

Learning from: Severe Maladministration



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

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Introduction

In recent months I've been asked whether mould was a 'grey rhino' event. In risk management speak, this is the opposite of the 'black swan': a visible problem overlooked.

The answer is yes. And faulty roofs, windows, overheating or heating loss could replace damp and mould as a primary driver of severe maladministration within the next 12 months.

Of course, these repairs could cause mould, but crucially they may also relate to other hazards. Which brings us to phase 2 of Awaab's Law.

Our latest learning from severe maladministration report considers other hazards. It is important to note the government has not yet set out which hazards are included in phase 2 or the outcome of the 'test and learn' approach. This report reflects what we see in our casework. Cases include an elderly woman reporting sewerage leaks 20 times over 9 years. A vulnerable resident without effective heating for 4 years.

Another resident with unsafe drinking water for 8 months and someone else exposed to lead paint. In some cases, residents report living cost pressures caused by higher energy bills.

Most social homes are free of these hazards. But this fact makes the experiences of these residents even more shocking.

Stepping back, 4 themes characterize cases involving hazards.

1. Culture and people.
2. Process and policy.
3. Systems and data.
4. Governance and oversight.

Cultural issues must sit behind at least some cases. Excessive time lapsed without the right thing being done or escalations to the right person. Other issues include people stretch, competency and silos at work.

Processes are not followed, either because they are unclear, inadequate, lacking quality assurance, or yet to embed. Individual circumstances are overlooked, communication haphazard, multiple surveys commissioned without progress being made, works schedules more limited than expert advice proposes, and no evidence of temporary moves being considered. A lack of resources may underpin each.

Policy weaknesses can also lead to the wrong process. I have concerns phase 1 of Awaab's Law could have created some false comfort landlords are prepared.

Many landlords talk confidently of meeting their obligations under the law. What is this based on? How robust is the data? How has the board scrutinised it?

Where multiple hazards are present in a single home, the assessment will be more complex. Complexity requires clarity and agility in decision-making, often absent in these cases.

System issues include poor data or system integration. This leads to a reliance on workarounds and institutional knowledge. It too can contribute to poor communication.

Which raises governance issues. These cases sometimes reveal unclear accountability and an absence of issues being escalated. An example of this is reports of refused access or repeat visits to the same property. What's this tell the board about assurance? Has it challenged the reliability of its data against the reality of some resident experiences? Is the improvement plan on track and producing the results expected? And what about those cultural issues?

This may feel like a tough ask. But it is meant as a reality check. Awaab's Law was introduced less than 6 months ago. For some landlords, phase 2 is a wholly different prospect to what was required last October.

To many landlords' credit, more innovation and resource is going into those 4 areas, but this may not be universal or sustained, given other competing pressures. More resources are planned by some landlords specifically for damp and mould, which is positive. But what about other emerging issues?

Many landlords missed on the 'grey rhino' of damp and mould. We must make sure we do not do so again with other warning signs.

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.

Multiple hazards

Dealing with more than one hazard under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) at the same time can be complex. It often requires multiple inspections and clear communication with the resident.

Notting Hill Genesis

We made a finding of severe maladministration for **Notting Hill Genesis** (202426061*) after it failed to do various repairs. This led to multiple hazards being present in the home at the same time. This included ineffective heating, no hot water, and mould growing throughout their home.

There were also concerns around the balcony door and windows in the home.

The landlord was aware of the faulty heating and hot water as well as the recurrent mould growth for at least 2 years. It failed to provide an effective and lasting resolution to any of these issues.

There is no evidence it then took any steps to complete the actions it said it would in its complaint responses. There was insufficient evidence the landlord acted in line with its repair or damp and mould policies and procedures.

Landlord learning statement

The landlord has centralised its complaints function. It has also strengthened contractor management and oversight and improved how it identifies and responds to resident vulnerability.

It is improving record keeping and communication through its new resident first target operating model.

London Borough of Lambeth

London Borough of Lambeth (202219263*) failed to deal with a sewerage leak for 3 years. This left the resident living in what she reported as horrific conditions. It caused other issues in the house too, including severe damp and mould.

The resident reported a “strange sticky substance was oozing” from the communal stack pipe. The bathroom walls concealed the leak. She reported it again to the landlord 2 months later.

The landlord removed the plasterboard in the resident’s bathroom and exposed the communal soil pipe to confirm the source of the leak. It said it needed access to all properties to repair the leak. Operatives taped the hole in the resident’s bathroom with a plastic bag during the interim period.

Due to a lack of communication during the works, the resident reached out to her councillor. They recommended a temporary move due to the impact of the sewerage.

At this point, nearly 18 months after the resident first reported the issue, the toilet would no longer flush. It caused additional problems too.

There was damp and mould in the bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen. The kitchen cupboards were unstable due to the damp. The gutter system directed water below the door threshold, causing rising damp inside the property. There was a defect with the windows that allowed water to enter the property, along with blocked gullies, and sewage overflow outside the property.

The landlord regularly identified issues and repairs but did not complete them. There was no evidence provided to us about these jobs. The landlord only moved the resident into temporary accommodation 3 years into the complaint.

Landlord learning statement

The landlord has carried out complaint handling training for staff. This includes on identifying and logging complaints, response deadlines and how to handle delays, addressing all issues of a complaint, and putting things right.

It has also reviewed its complaint handling policy, to make sure it complies fully with the Complaint Handling Code.

Learning from multiple hazards

Phase 2 of Awaab's Law will mean landlords potentially need to respond to more than one hazard. This may require different timescales.

We already see in our casework how closely hazards interlink. This can cause multiple issues and complexity in fixing the issues, with one making another worse.

Clear communication and strong knowledge and information management is a must as a firm foundation for a positive response. Landlords should also consider how the triaging of these service requests is happening, and whether there is need for any changes in this area.

Hazards at letting

An opportune time to resolve issues in a home is while it's empty. We appreciate the need to turn vacancies around quickly for those waiting. But landlords must not let homes in a condition that contains hazards.

London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (202426184*) left a resident without hot water or heating for 285 days when they first moved in.

The landlord failed to offer temporary solutions or consider whether it should temporarily move the resident, despite it being in the middle of winter.

The landlord fitted a new boiler 4 months after its stage 1 complaint response. This was due to failed attempts to fix the old boiler.

Despite the urgency of the situation, the landlord failed to proactively update the resident during this time. It also did not offer compensation appropriate for the failings.

Learning from hazards at letting

Landlords should make sure homes are free of these hazards, in good condition, and signed off as meeting its 'void standard'. Looking ahead, landlords must consider how these homes also meet the new Decent Homes Standard.

This is also an important time for building trust between landlord and resident. Landlords should make sure it deals with any issues quickly and effectively communicates this to the resident.

Asbestos

While not prevalent in many homes across England, landlords need to be aware of how to deal with asbestos due to the health risks.

Bristol City Council

We made a finding of severe maladministration for how **Bristol City Council** ([202339015](#)) dealt with a repair involving asbestos.

It failed to act for 7 months after the resident first reported the issue. It did not prioritise the repair with the necessary urgency.

The landlord removed the asbestos containing materials 5 months after the asbestos survey. It is unclear why it took this long.

The landlord had the ceiling removed and signed off as safe to repair. However, it still failed to act quickly to make the repairs.

Nor did it check on the contractor to make sure it was meeting timescales.

Some of the repairs were still outstanding when we made our determination. Our orders remedied this for the resident.

The failure to keep accurate records caused the resident inconvenience and time to get his complaint resolved.

Landlord learning statement

The landlord says it will strengthen the oversight of contractors. It will also enhance asbestos management procedures and complete a review of its record keeping and complaints handling processes.

Southampton City Council

Southampton City Council (202319968) failed to respond effectively to concerns around asbestos.

This left a resident with a lung condition distressed in his home for months without resolution.

After he received a copy of the asbestos survey, which showed there could be some present in his home, the landlord did not act for 3 months. In this time the resident sent 6 chaser emails.

The landlord did not act urgently. It did eventually confirm the tiles in question did not contain asbestos. However, it failed to consider the resident's concerns about other rooms or communicate this to him. Nor did it recognise these failings in its complaint responses.

Landlord learning statement

The landlord has put in place a range of improvements. It now integrates early confirmation of repairs, transparent timelines, and regular updates as standard practice.

It has refreshed staff training around asbestos procedures to ensure safety and compliance. It has updated its remedies in line with our guidance.

Learning from asbestos

Asbestos is a hazard under the HHSRS. This requires the landlord to identify if asbestos is present, or likely to be present, in a property. It must however keep accurate records in relation to all locations of the asbestos, or suspected asbestos, and keep its condition under review.

Due to the harmful impact it can have on residents, landlords must take an empathetic approach to the issue. This is both in its communications and handling.

Where vulnerabilities are present and known in a household, this could mean the case needs to be further prioritised.

Lead

Like asbestos, lead can release particles that may be harmful if you're exposed to them.

ForHousing

ForHousing (202428069*) delayed taking action which left a resident exposed to lead particles for 9 months.

Despite the ongoing contact from the resident, the landlord failed to act effectively. It acted without urgency despite the resident saying her and her child could not live in the home.

The landlord also said the resident was responsible for the decoration of the home and advised the resident not to remove the paint. However, it did not take the hazard into account and making sure the home was free of it. The resident carried out a home test kit which came back positive, but the landlord did not act on this. It said there was no risk in the property despite not doing an inspection.

The resident went to the local authority to speed up the repairs. However, when the repairs began, the landlord delayed them without explanation.

Landlord learning statement

The landlord said all surveyors are now completing lead awareness training.

It has introduced lead testing kits to support earlier identification. It has set out clear written advice for residents when they find issues like lead. It has aligned its processes for managing lead exposure with its established asbestos procedures.

Learning from lead

Much like asbestos, there is a health impact from the exposure to lead particles. This means that landlords should investigate any reports quickly.

Where discovered, landlords should keep good records on where this is. It must make sure that it limits exposure while it removes the hazard.

Due to the harmful impact it can have on residents, landlords must take an empathetic approach to the issue. This is both in its communications and handling. Where vulnerabilities are present and known in a household, this could mean the case needs to be further prioritised.

Heating loss

Many landlord policies treat heating loss as an emergency repair. The loss of heating for even a short period of time can be disrupting.

Leicester City Council

Leicester City Council (202331091*) failed to restore heating to a home for nearly a year. This is despite the home containing a young baby.

When the resident reported the issue, the landlord initially carried out a prompt inspection. However, it then failed to do repairs for a further 5 months. The landlord did not monitor the repair or communicate with the resident.

When it did make some repairs, the heating did not return to the home. This then took a further 5 months to complete. During this time, the landlord failed to see if the resident had any temporary heating.

This was a serious omission given that the household included a young baby, which should have prompted additional care and urgency.

Landlord learning statement

The landlord says it continues to improve its record keeping, especially around leasehold properties. It has invested in its complaints team to help investigate complaints and embed continuous learning from them.

It is also restructuring its district heating team. This will make sure there are technical experts on hand to help diagnose complex repairs and avoid unnecessary repairs.

London Borough of Westminster

London Borough of Westminster (202427875*) failed to provide reliable heating for 18 months. This left a family with children with vulnerabilities sleeping in cold rooms. It also led to the family falling into fuel poverty.

The landlord failed to fully check the heating system when the resident first reported her concerns. It was also unable to supply full and detailed records of the repairs.

Due to the repeated failings, the supplier cut the resident's electricity off and put her on a different system. This added cost pushed the family into fuel poverty.

The landlord did not consider the household's vulnerabilities and the impact the lack of reliable heating was having.

Landlord learning statement

The landlord has implemented a new vulnerability policy that requires staff to carry out household support reviews. This makes sure it considers each resident's situation and provides appropriate support while investigating their complaint.

It has also increased the size of its complaints team, adopting a new system for managing complaints. It has developed a learning framework to make sure it reflects on service delivery and identifies opportunities to improve.

Hyde Group

Hyde Group (202342593*) failed to complete actions it committed to in its complaint responses. This meant a resident's heating was not working effectively for over 4 years.

There was poor record keeping and communication throughout. It did not keep repairs logs or inspection notes. When it did come to fix the radiators, 7 months after its stage 1 complaint, they did not work afterwards. The resident informed the landlord of this, but they did not act with urgency despite it being in the middle of winter.

Despite being aware of the resident's vulnerability, there is no evidence to show the landlord considered this in its decision making.

The landlord often referred the resident to its contractor about the ongoing issue. The contractor often referred them back to the landlord. While the landlord did offer some temporary heating, this should only ever have been a temporary mitigating measure.

Landlord learning statement

The landlord has improved its record keeping around vulnerabilities. It uses its specialist contractor reports to diagnose issues correctly so it can do repairs without delay.

It has also improved its communication, with residents able to track repairs online and report issues. The landlord keeps records on refused access and explains how this can impact resolution of an issue.

L&Q

L&Q (202406843*) failed to resolve heating and other repair issues for nearly 3 years. The repairs were outstanding at the point of our determination.

The landlord had carried out an inspection and was aware of the heating issues, as well as problems with damp and mould and faulty windows. However, it did not act in a timely manner.

The landlord often delayed works for so long that it needed to do another inspection. It told the local MP that it had completed works. There is no evidence of this. The landlord's own system showed some of those jobs as cancelled.

The landlord was not proactive when the resident had to cancel an appointment due to being unwell.

The resident reported that the temporary heating provided was making the air dry and impacting her son's vulnerability. She was also unable to open windows due to other repair issues. This worsened the damp in the home.

At the point of determination, the repairs were outstanding. Our orders in this case rectified this situation for the resident.

Landlord learning statement

Since this case, the landlord has delivered its Repairs Change Project to improve request handling and communication with residents. It has introduced a new way of working, with complex repairs managed by its surveying team. This allows day-to-day staff to focus on reactive work.

Notting Hill Genesis

We made 2 findings of severe maladministration in 2 different **Notting Hill Genesis** cases. In these cases, the landlord failed to act effectively within timescales.

Case 202316956*

The landlord left the resident for 2 years without a working boiler. It did not follow through on agreed actions. It also failed to make sure it completed repairs within its policy timescales and did not act on repeated reports.

The poor record keeping limited its ability to investigate the complaint thoroughly. This meant that it made mistakes in its complaint responses. It mentioned its gas safety reporting despite the boiler being an electric one.

It failed to provide any timeframes for when it would do the repairs. The resident had to chase on numerous occasions to see if it could resolve the situation.

Although the landlord knew from its complaint responses that the resident had no heating, it did not act proactively. It failed to arrange an inspection to try to resolve the issue.

Case 202413821*

Significant issues with the heating were present in the resident's home for 14 months. A leak from the boiler caused the need for the original repair.

The landlord arranged an emergency repair but was unable to access the home. They tried another 2 times before they gained access for a temporary fix. It carried out a full repair just days later.

The poor records meant it is hard to confirm whether the resident remained without heating for the 4 months. It did not show other ways of getting the repair resolved after the lack of access, such as communicating with the resident or creating an action plan.

There were other issues within this complaint in how the landlord responded to a leak and how it handled the repairs linked to that. Combining these together, the issues had a significant impact on the resident.

Landlord learning statement

The landlord has centralised its complaints function. It has also strengthened contractor management and oversight and improved how it identifies and responds to resident vulnerability.

It is improving record keeping and communication through its new resident first target operating model.

Learning from heating loss

The loss of heating can have a significant impact on a household, even if it is temporary. Landlords have a responsibility to keep their homes free of excess cold, which is one of the hazards listed under the HHSRS.

The cases in this section show the importance of effective knowledge and information management.

When the landlord fails to keep good records and its systems cannot retrieve accurate information, it loses a clear picture of the situation. As a result, its complaint response breaks down.

This is not just for the actual repair and issue itself, but how well the landlord triages in the first instance.

Most losses of heating require an emergency response. However, if landlords cannot fix the issue immediately, the urgency to resolve it will change depending on the household's individual circumstances. Where a landlord is aware of these, it should factor it into its decision making.

Hot water and/or heating loss

When a home loses hot water, or both heating and hot water, it can cause even further inconvenience to the household.

Hyde Group

Hyde Group (202440396) left a vulnerable household without hot water for 7 months. This meant they were unable to wash in their own home.

The landlord initially acted in a timely manner. However, there was a significant error in the diagnosis of the cause of the issue. The resident said she had to travel to her mother's house for a bath. She needed this to ease the pain from her vulnerability.

The landlord attended the home on multiple occasions but could not resolve the issue. During the time of the reports, she said the ongoing issues were making her feel suicidal.

The landlord did not provide us with any evidence to show it contacted the resident after she said this. It should have considered a safeguarding referral or done a risk assessment.

The landlord started to assume the resident was in the wrong and not leaving the tank on long enough to start the hot water.

However, there is no evidence this is based on findings from any contractor visits. It said the resident wanted a gas boiler and was using the complaints system to get this. It therefore said it was not a repair issue, and it would not provide a gas system.

The landlord fixed the problem when it realised it had not properly installed the heater.

Landlord learning statement

The landlord has improved its record keeping around vulnerabilities. It uses its specialist contractor reports to diagnose issues correctly so it can do repairs without delay.

It has also improved its communication, with residents able to track repairs online and report issues. The landlord keeps records on refused access and explains how this can impact resolution of an issue.

Clarion

Clarion (202452033*) failed to follow its vulnerable persons policy after the loss of heating and hot water.

When the resident first reported the loss of heating and hot water, the landlord did not treat it as an emergency. It failed to respond with the urgency the situation required. It also did not check if the resident had access to any temporary heating.

A contractor attended and the heating was working, but they recommended a heat loss survey. It did not arrange one in a timely manner. Instead, the resident continued to report the same issues.

The heat loss survey found poor insulation throughout and single glazed windows. It did not discuss temporary heating at this time despite the home needing new radiators. It also could have looked at the boiler during its voids process to see it was 18 years old and needed replacing. This would have meant the home was well heated from the beginning.

It took over 7 weeks for the landlord to respond to the resident's reports he had not moved his belongings into the property. This caused him to spend money on storage and buying items to use in the property.

The landlord undertook another inspection which recommended it replace all the radiators in the home. This did not happen until our orders resolved this for the resident.

Landlord learning statement

Since this case the landlord has strengthened its voids process with further testing of gas and heating systems. It also now has a mandatory, structured property review before any homes can be relet. This makes sure there are no underlying issues.

It has also introduced a stronger process to record resident vulnerabilities at the point of sign-up. It also makes sure support workers and advocates are involved where needed.

London Borough of Lambeth

London Borough of Lambeth (202422491*) failed to restore heating and hot water for 3 months. Communication with the resident was poor, with missed appointments, and unannounced visits.

The resident said that on one occasion, an operative used a kitchen knife during the works.

The landlord said it tried and gain access without success on several occasions. However, there is no supporting evidence around gaining access and giving notice of appointments.

The landlord also committed to a further inspection of the boiler. However, it was not clear if this went ahead or not.

At the same time, we found severe maladministration for how the landlord did not do timely or effective repairs for a roof leak. It did not act on an emergency kitchen sink leak, leaving the resident without a working sink. It also took 8 months to inspect the damp and mould present in the home.

Landlord learning statement

The landlord has carried out complaint handling training for staff. This includes on identifying and logging complaints, response deadlines and how to handle delays, addressing all issues of a complaint, and putting things right.

It has also reviewed its complaint handling policy, to make sure it complies fully with the Complaint Handling Code.

Birmingham City Council

Birmingham City Council (202435671*) did not safeguard a resident's health and wellbeing during a heating loss case.

The case was complex. The resident had not engaged with the landlord when it attempted to access his property to maintain it and book repairs. This is despite not having hot water or heating for several years.

The landlord had to force entry and change the lock so it could check the gas safety. However, the landlord did not properly warn him beforehand or check whether the home needed any other repairs. The resident said he was freezing due to the gas supply being off, but this did not prompt a welfare check. It also did not carry out a risk assessment.

The resident said he heated his property using a camping stove due to having no other means of heating. The resident said the landlord did not give him a new key for his back door when it forced entry. He said this made him feel imprisoned in his home and he did not know how he would escape if there was a fire.

Landlord learning statement

The landlord has introduced new approaches to resident engagement, including updated policies on access and vulnerabilities. It will apply lessons learned to improve future service delivery.

Learning from hot water and/or heating loss

The HHSRS notes the importance of having an appropriate heating system, properly installed and maintained.

Landlords should consider losses of heating and hot water as urgent and investigate the issues promptly. It should look at whether there are vulnerabilities within the home that require any additional support.

It should also consider whether it needs to put temporary measures in place if it cannot resolve the problem on its initial visit.

Where works take a few visits to complete, the landlord should regularly communicate with the resident about their health and wellbeing.

Excess cold

These cases look at where the excess cold hazard has come from a lack of repair or component in the house not working as it should be.

Origin Housing

Origin Housing (202423067) did not do repairs to an external door for over 2 years. It meant the resident and her son had to sleep on a sofa in the living room as the bedrooms were too cold to sleep in.

Before the landlord resolved the issues 28 months after the first report, it tried numerous ways to fix the situation.

Many of these efforts did not materialise. It failed to offer temporary heating until a year after the first report.

The landlord also said it tried to replace the door, but the resident had not returned calls or emails. However, it could not provide any evidence of this to the resident or us.

Landlord learning statement

The landlord will put measures in place to make sure the failings do not happen again. It is looking at how it arranges inspections and calls on its contractors.

A2Dominion

A2Dominion (202443598*) failed to address concerns around heat loss via windows and doors.

The landlord managed its knowledge and information poorly throughout. It also failed to provide us with some of the evidence we needed for our investigation.

The landlord failed to arrange a survey for 8 weeks. after the resident reported the issue. There are no records about what this found. It did not communicate regularly with the resident about the ongoing problems. The landlord did not take into account the impact the ongoing cold had on the household, both in health and financial terms.

The landlord later said it would need to resolve the issues through its planned works programme. The landlord then later sent another surveyor to the home to move the repairs forwards. We had not seen any updates of the repairs at the point of determination. Our orders remedied the situation for the resident.

Landlord learning statement

The landlord did focused training on making sure it responds in a timely and professional way and improves record keeping. As well as improving record keeping, it is to install a new repairs IT system later this year that will track surveys and any follow-on works. It has added resources to its complaints and resolution team to reduce any backlogs and is now able to monitor response times more effectively.

Key learning from excess cold

Landlords have a responsibility under the HHSRS to assess hazards and risks within its rented properties. Suboptimal indoor temperatures are a potential hazard as there is a small risk of adverse health effects.

The HHSRS also advises that very young children fall within the category of those most vulnerable to these temperatures.

Landlords must consider whether reports of cold temperatures in a property amount to a hazard and require action. It must do additional monitoring of the home where it's identified potential hazards.

Also, the Decent Homes Standard requires the landlord to make sure the home offers a reasonable level of thermal comfort.

Overheating

While England is typically a colder country, overheating is a key hazard that landlords need to be aware of. With climate change taking record temperatures even higher, this is becoming more of an issue.

Southern Housing

Southern Housing (202520109*) did not rectify an overheating issue. This led to temperatures of 34°C in the home. The resident said he and his son were waking up with headaches and difficulty breathing. He said his wife had 2 strokes.

The landlord said the overheating was due to defects in the building design and it would report these to the developer. It did not do so. It failed to consider whether excess heat was a hazard and whether it needed to mitigate the effect of this.

It did not investigate these issues despite meeting with residents and saying it would put measures in place to assess what was happening. It told residents it would ask the managing agent to do an overheating assessment. There is no evidence of this report.

The landlord said air conditioning would be too expensive to install but did not explore other options for a significant period. It did arrange for air cooling units, but the resident did not accept this.

The landlord took too long to resolve the situation and did not show it understood its obligations as a landlord during this case.

Landlord learning statement

The landlord has established a comprehensive register of buildings managed by external agents to make sure clarity of responsibilities.

It now has a complex case process, introducing monthly reviews to support a structured and accountable approach to case management. Additionally, it has strengthened its complaint monitoring controls to map patterns in issues reported and link them to potential hazards.

Key learning from overheating

The risk of overheating is emerging, especially as our climate warms. The thermal efficiency of homes, especially new build or where homes are single aspect, can also increase the risk.

Resolving can present significant costs. It is important landlords explore options, communicate well with the resident, and consider any temporary mitigants.

Water

Contaminated water is a key hazard. While there may be occasions that the water supply is the responsibility of the water company, there are also various aspects that the landlord has obligations for.

A2Dominion

A2Dominion (202417347) failed to resolve contaminated water for 8 months.

When the resident first raised the issues, the landlord marked the job as complete in error. No action was taken. The landlord then took no action for another eight months after it raised a second job. It later upgraded the job to urgent and required follow-up work.

There is no evidence the landlord assessed or tested the water quality to make sure it did not pose a hazard. The resident told the landlord the water was not drinkable.

He also said he was suffering from a skin condition he thought was due to the poor water.

When it raised another urgent work request, the landlord text messaged the resident on the same day to confirm it would attend that afternoon. Due to the short notice, the resident was not at home. It did not rearrange the appointment.

The landlord tried to contact the resident without success. It also tried another appointment on the same day, but the resident was again not at home.

The landlord did end up carrying out some repairs. It showed it took his vulnerability into account when making these later appointments. However, the resident reported the repairs did not work and the issues persisted. Our orders rectified this for the resident.

Landlord learning statement

The landlord is working to improve its internal communication and complaint handling. It is bringing teams together to work in a way which provides consistent oversight and management of residents' cases. It is also making improvements to its record keeping so it responds to and follows up on works and complaints consistently and promptly.

Key learning from water

Landlords should be aware of their role and responsibilities surrounding this key hazard and the impact it can have on any household it affects.

Landlords should treat all hazards, including uncommon ones, with the same urgency. They must investigate quickly and communicate effectively.

Working with third parties is also key. Landlords should do this efficiently and on time to ensure they do not delay a resident's resolution.

Pests

Tackling pests can be a complex issue for landlords, with multiple visits required to tackle the root cause or eliminate the issue completely.

A2Dominion

A2Dominion (202332211*) failed to resolve a pest infestation for 2 years. There were children with vulnerabilities in the home, and the resident reported flies, scratching, and the smell of dead rats.

The resident heard scratching soon after she moved in. However, she did not report it straight away as she did not know what was causing it. The landlord arranged pest control after the local authority advised it to, which was appropriate.

However, the landlord was not proactive in its repairs. The resident had to chase 5 months later. The first repairs report is 6 months after the resident first reported the issues. It took 11 months for the landlord to act on pest control's recommendations for works.

A reduction in reporting noises showed some of the actions were working. However, when the reports increased again, the landlord delayed its response again. It did not create an action plan and while it appointed a single point of contact, the resident still had to chase at least 10 times for updates.

Despite the children in the house having support needs, the landlord did not carry out a risk assessment. Nor did it consider a temporary move. It did not have these vulnerabilities recorded.

The resident has also said the quality of some works was not good. The landlord did not carry out a post-inspection in this case.

Landlord learning statement

The landlord has completed a full revision of its pest control policy. This now includes clearer roles and responsibilities, a structured mechanism for case conferences on complex cases, better assessment and recording vulnerabilities in every case, and clearer standards for communication.

It has also streamlined pest proofing by allowing the pest contractor to undertake proofing directly. This avoids delays previously caused by passing work to other teams.

Key learning from pests

The Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 says landlords must fix structural problems that let pests into a home. The Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 adds that landlords must keep homes safe and healthy to live in.

This includes dealing with infestations. If pests are already in the property before a tenant moves in, the landlord must take action to remove them.

Landlords must take pest complaints seriously and make timely repairs. They must also keep residents informed with clear updates and realistic timelines.

Where pests pose health risks or affect wellbeing, landlords should assess the need for a temporary move. This includes considering the resident's individual circumstances and any vulnerabilities.

It is important landlords maintain effective communication with the resident throughout the process. They should show the progress they have made and explain any alternative actions they may take.

Landlords should assess the severity of the situation and the household's individual circumstances. They should then decide whether a temporary move is appropriate and what option best supports the resident.

As it seeks to eradicate the issue from the home, landlords should make sure there are follow up appointments to access the entry points and whether the action taken has been successful.

Lifts

While not something that we see often in our casework, lifts are a key hazard that landlords need to be on top of. Where failings happen in this area, it can link to fire safety.

Notting Hill Genesis

Notting Hill Genesis (202506714*) delayed in carrying out repairs to a lift. This meant a vulnerable resident, who requires overnight carers, had trouble using the building.

The Building Safety Regulator registered the building as a higher risk.

The landlord did not consider reasonable adjustments in this case. It identified the cause of the lift breakdowns but did not put in place a plan to resolve it. The resident told the landlord using the stairs caused her to have a seizure in the stairwell.

There is no evidence the landlord told the local Fire and Rescue services that the lift was out of order. When the landlord fixed the lift, there is no evidence it told anyone it was working again.

There is no evidence the landlord considered whether it should complete a risk assessment or Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) for the resident.

Landlord learning statement

The landlord has centralised its complaints function. It has also strengthened contractor management and oversight and improved how it identifies and responds to resident vulnerability.

It is improving record keeping and communication through its new resident first target operating model.

Key learning from lifts

Repairs to lifts can be complex. While we understand that complex repairs may require additional time for the landlord to complete them, there is an expectation the landlord keeps in regular communication with residents and updates them on the progress of the repairs.

Sewerage

Leaks from sewerage can cause a number of issues to a household. While unpleasant for the resident living in a home, where there has been sewerage leaking, it can also lead to hazards and other urgent repairs if left untreated.

Origin Housing

We found severe maladministration for how **Origin Housing (202402900)** handled a sewerage leak for a vulnerable resident.

When the resident reported the sewerage, the landlord attended the same day to contain it. It did not respond within emergency timescales of 2 hours as per its policy. It also did not clean up the sewerage from the house.

It thought its contractor would contact the resident and arrange for any further repairs or cleaning. This did not happen.

The landlord failed to offer a temporary move, this forced the resident to stay with family. This is despite the contractor requesting a temporary move. This failing caused the resident further distress.

The landlord said there were access issues regarding the cleaning. However, the resident says she was hesitant to travel to the house while she was vulnerable. This is also due to the missed appointments previously meant she did not trust the landlord would attend.

Given the seriousness of the cleaning needed, the landlord should have used its legal duty to enter the property. It did not and the home remained unclean at the time of determination.

Landlord learning statement

The landlord has ensured that its temporary moves policy is up to date. It has also carried out training for staff to provide improved compliance with it in practice.

Plymouth Community Homes

Plymouth Community Homes (202421163*) failed to deal with a toilet that filled up with sewerage for 9 years. This led to sewerage in her bathroom and garden. It also left the resident, who is elderly, with high water bills.

The resident reported the issues 20 times over the years, but the landlord failed to resolve the issue. While it responded to every report within timescales, it did not resolve the issue.

The landlord requested its contractor carry out a CCTV survey 3 times during this period. The landlord had no survey reports or outcomes noted.

Due to the ongoing nature of the issue, the resident tried to resolve this herself by using lots of water. It led to court papers from the water company and the resident experiencing panic attacks.

It eventually helped to clear some of these high bills after the resident moved out of the home. It did not resolve the issue until a year after she moved out.

Landlord learning statement

The landlord has put in place new measures to strengthen its oversight of complex repairs. It also made improvements to how it clarifies escalation arrangements where repeated failures occur.

Notting Hill Genesis

We found severe maladministration for how **Notting Hill Genesis** (202422119) failed to provide mitigating measures.

The resident requested sandbags from the landlord to block the toilet doorways to prevent sewage reaching other parts of the flat in case of further incidents. This follows on from previous incidents raised. The landlord's contractor had said it will happen again due to the extent of the sewerage leak.

Another sewerage leak occurred and the landlord had not provided sandbags. While the sewerage did not end up on the floors this time, it caused the resident distress. In its complaint responses, the resident repeatedly asked for sandbags.

The landlord did not provide them. This meant the resident took a long time chasing a basic prevention measure.

The landlord failed to correctly direct the resident to its insurer as per its policy and instead offered compensation that was not at the level the resident estimated it should be at. This meant she was unable to claim for her loss of belongings.

Landlord learning statement

The landlord has centralised its complaints function. It has also strengthened contractor management and oversight and improved how it identifies and responds to resident vulnerability.

It is improving record keeping and communication through its new resident first target operating model.

Key learning from sewerage

A sewage leak qualifies as an emergency repair because it can pose serious health risks (due to biohazards and contamination) and cause structural damage to a property. This can worsen significantly if not addressed promptly.

A sewage leak in the resident's flat could be a serious Category 1 hazard under the HHSRS related to domestic hygiene. Section 11 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 also requires landlords to maintain installations for sanitation.

Landlords should make sure that where there are reports of sewerage, they act on them with urgency.

The landlord should be curious about the root cause and address this promptly. Landlords should inform residents about any action plans and updates along the way.

Centre for Learning resources

Hazards key topics page.

Awaab's Law key topics page.

Awaab's Law and hazards training on the Learning Hub.

Knowledge and information management key topics page.

Knowledge and information management training on the Learning Hub.

Attitudes, respect, and rights key topics page.

Attitudes, respect, and rights training on the Learning Hub.

The Complaint Handling Code

* We anonymise all decisions by removing residents' names, but we publish landlords' names. In some cases, we choose not to publish a decision if doing so is not in the resident's or landlord's interest. Or if publishing it could compromise the resident's anonymity.

Glossary of terms used

Term used	Meaning
Severe maladministration	A finding made by the Housing Ombudsman. Where a landlord has failed significantly in its duties. It shows serious service failure that caused residents harm, distress, or disadvantage.
HHSRS	The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) is the way councils in England check whether a home is safe to live in.
Awaab's Law	A new law in England that forces social landlords to fix dangerous problems, especially damp and mould, within set timeframes.
Building Safety Regulator	The Building Safety Regulator (BSR) ensures that buildings in England are designed, built, and managed safely.
Decent Homes Standard	The Decent Homes Standard (DHS) is the minimum quality level that rented homes in England must meet.
Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP)	A Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) is a written, individual plan that explains how a person who cannot evacuate independently will get out of a building safely in an emergency, such as a fire.

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