

Case studies

Hazardous disrepair in social housing

February 2026

Background

1. As part of the Local Government and Housing Committee's inquiry into hazardous disrepair in social housing, the Citizen Engagement Team proposed a qualitative approach to engagement, comprising one-to-one depth interviews with social housing tenants in Wales.
2. This paper is based upon contributions made by four contributors and took place between 10 February – 18 February.

Contributors

3. Contributors were sourced through the National Independent Tenant Voice Cymru (NITVC) and TPAS Cymru.
4. Four social housing tenants contributed across four Senedd constituencies.
5. Thank you to everyone who contributed to the programme of engagement.

Format

6. The format of engagement was informal and largely comparable across all interviews, but varied slightly to meet the specific needs of contributors. All interviews were held online.



Case study 1

- 7.** The tenant currently lives in a social housing property in Caerphilly. She has been happily living in this property for approximately two years. She was transferred to her current home from another three bedroom, social housing property where she had been living for approximately 4 – 5 years.
- 8.** The tenant reported experiencing extensive damp throughout her previous property, with mould spreading from floor to ceiling in both the kitchen and bedrooms. Water seeped through the skirting boards, causing additional damp and mould in the living room.
- 9.** Although she had only lived in the property for approximately two months before the issues emerged, the first signs appeared as patches on the walls and later spread to clothing, toys, and furniture. She later learned that the previous tenant had also reported damp and mould, but no information about these issues had been disclosed prior to her moving in.
- 10.** She reported a gradual decline in her health as the conditions in the home worsened, a concern also noted in correspondence by her health visitor.

“It was awful. My daughter was really ill through it. She was put on pumps that she was using continuously. We were all suffering with really bad chests. Emotionally it ruined me.”

- 11.** Aside from physical health issues, she elaborated on the detrimental impact on her mental health.

“There were arguments between me and my partner in the house through it all. It was like I was lonely because I wouldn’t let anyone come to the house. It was a big impact on us all really, because the kids couldn’t have anyone over. I wouldn’t even allow family towards the end, because it was just embarrassing.”

- 12.** The living room and kitchen were the most severely affected areas, with damp eventually spreading to the bedroom above. She described the financial strain of needing to repeatedly replace furniture, clothing, and other household items damaged by the damp and mould.

"I had to buy numerous sofas. Children's toys and clothes were being thrown out. Carpets were being ripped up. It was awful. Sometimes, I was living for months and months without flooring because I just couldn't afford to renew it.

Between having to renew everything, there was also the gas as well. I was spending money trying to keep the house warm because it was freezing - just trying to make it less damp. It was just hard work."

13. She reported the issue multiple times, but the landlord repeatedly attributed the damp and mould to various causes, including condensation from the tumble dryer, faulty extractor fans, leaks under the bath, problems with the boiler downpipe, a breach in the garden step, insufficient heating, a broken bath seal, and using the heating without an extractor fan.

"The first time I contacted them, they came out straight away, but as the months went on – half the time they wouldn't turn up. I had to report it multiple times.

I was getting to the point that my dad was reporting it. I had letters from the health visitor who were telling me to ring up the fire brigade to condemn the sockets because of the water.

We had a lot of dehumidifiers in the house. Towards the end they were coming out every month to wash and paint the walls. They came out to try and paint the walls and it was just running off."

14. Despite involvement from surveyors, housing officers, environmental health, and the local councillor, no meaningful progress was made. She described challenging interactions with the surveyor, noting that he was dismissive and placed blame on her.

15. The tenant explained that the situation only began to improve after her friend intervened. Her friend, whose grandson experiences head-induced seizures, became concerned when the child suffered a seizure shortly after being collected from the tenant's home.

16. The friend, who was supporting the tenant during the interview, explained that she decided to escalate the matter, stating that although she had initially been asked not to get involved, she felt the circumstances had become

unacceptable. She subsequently raised the issue at a senior level, bringing it to the attention of the housing association's Chief Executive. This intervention prompted a meaningful response.

"I said, "I know I've offered and you've told me not to get involved but enough's enough with this now", and that's the only reason it was resolved. Members of staff went to that property 21 times. One looked at a toy covered in mould and said it was awful, but nothing was done. I took it direct to the CEO. As an 'Involved tenant', I had that access and he was mortified. But that's when the issue was resolved."

17. The tenant explained that she would likely still be living in the previous property had her friend not intervened. Following this intervention, she was moved to her current home, initially on a temporary basis pending repairs to the former property. She was later offered a full tenancy in the new home.

18. The tenant noted the positive impact that a safe, dry home had on her family. Her children were noticeably happier, and within a few months her daughter no longer required inhalers. The family's wellbeing and relationships also improved.

"First night there, they were so happy. When I moved, within 2 – 3 months of being there, my daughter's been off all of her pumps. My relationship is better and the kids are happier."

19. She was initially informed she would need to return to the original property once repairs were completed, which caused considerable distress. Her friend again intervened, arguing that the family should not be expected to return after experiencing prolonged unsuitable conditions. As a result, she was permitted to remain in the new property and received compensation.

"In the end, they wrote off some arrears. They did step up. "

Solutions

20. Having reflected on their experience, the tenant and the individual who supported them outlined several potential improvements.

- **Advocacy:** Some tenants may feel unable or unwilling to raise concerns due to fear of repercussions or a lack of confidence. In such cases, access to an independent advocate can help ensure their issues are communicated effectively.

“There should be an independent person we can utilise to voice our concerns and do this on our behalf. There’s a lot of distrust between landlords and tenants. I had three and a half years of being accused of causing the damp and being ignored – despite the fact the previous tenant had the same issue.”

- **Transfer of records:** The tenant highlighted the need for property-based records rather than tenant-based records (or in addition to tenant-based records). If a record of the property’s history had been available, staff would have seen that the previous tenant had already reported damp and mould. This would have allowed the landlord to address the issue more quickly and avoid repeated delays.
- **Proactivity and lessons learned:** Landlords should take a proactive approach to monitoring and maintaining their housing stock. Reviewing call logs and maintenance reports over several years would help identify recurring issues, such as damp and mould, before they worsen or tenants stop reporting them. Earlier intervention would prevent long-term problems and ensure greater accountability.

“Landlords have a duty of care and they should go back over their call logs over 5 years and if anyone has even mentioned damp and mould, they need to get in three to check. Bigger issues are coming up because they’re left it too long and tenants have given up. The previous tenant went into private housing because she wasn’t getting anywhere with the situation. Landlords need to be held accountable.”

Case study 2

21. The tenant moved into social housing in 2002 after a divorce, becoming unintentionally homeless. She has two adult children, is a wheelchair user, and had declining health when she met her current partner.

22. When she first applied for housing, Torfaen's stock was transferring to Bron Afon Community Housing. She waited three years for a suitable, adaptable property and eventually moved into a three bedroom bungalow in Autumn 2011.

23. In 2017, her asthma worsened significantly. She discovered mould in a basket of yarn stored in her bedroom and soon noticed black mould forming on ceilings. Despite consistently ventilating the property, humidity levels inside were unusually high. Bron Afon installed monitors, which confirmed excessive moisture. She also sought advice from Asthma UK, who confirmed that humidity levels in the home were higher than recommended.

24. Further investigation found gaps in attic insulation. The insulation was corrected, and a positive input ventilation system was installed, resolving the issues within a few months.

25. Her health issues returned in winter 2021/22 due to a fault in the ceiling mounted unit, which was later replaced. The same issue reoccurred the following summer because the system switched off automatically in hot weather.

"Initially I was told I wasn't venting the house and I had to explain what I did. Oh it's your fault, you shouldn't put clothes on the radiator. I said they don't go on the radiator. . . this was the customer hub team though, and as soon as a surveyor came he realised what was going on. We were lucky that it was dealt with quite quickly."

26. Reflecting on her experience, she noted frustration at initially being blamed for poor ventilation, but once a surveyor assessed the property, the issue was identified and addressed quickly.

27. Whilst she is confident advocating for herself, she recognises that many tenants feel dismissed or blamed. Although the situation did not affect her mental health, it significantly impacted her physical wellbeing.

28. Bron Afon ultimately redecorated once repairs were completed and installed a replacement system. Her daughter also experienced damp in her own Bron Afon property, but in that case the issue was a leak and was resolved promptly.

29.

Solutions

- **Stock surveys:** She expressed concern that the organisation lacks full knowledge of its housing stock, noting that tenants may not always realise they can report damp and related issues. She called for a stock survey every year.

“Until we know our stock, we do not know what condition the property is in. . . we don’t know if there are tenants who have damp and not realised they can report it.”

Case study 3

30. The tenant has lived in social housing in Blaenau Gwent for approximately five years. He is disabled and lives with his wife and children. He experienced damp issues caused by a leaking waste pipe concealed behind plasterboard in their 1950s prefab property. The leak had likely been ongoing for some time and only became apparent when damp patches appeared above an internal doorway.

31. When he initially contacted the landlord, staff focused on whether he was drying clothes indoors or opening windows. He explained that he uses a condensing dryer and felt the questions were irrelevant. Despite the damp being limited to a single wall, an indication of a localised plumbing issue, it took three calls before an inspection was arranged. Several staff members were unable to identify the source; the problem was only recognised once an experienced long-serving employee attended the property and understood the layout.

32. The tenant later learned that raw sewage had been leaking inside the wall, causing mould growth. The housing association initially suggested simply applying a stain block, despite the health risks he highlighted. He felt their default approach was to attribute the problem to tenant behaviour rather than investigate the underlying cause.

33. A four-by-five foot section of the bathroom wall had to be removed to access and repair the leaking waste pipe. Although the pipe was fixed promptly, the wall itself took six months to reinstate. Four years later, the area still had not been repainted, so the tenant completed the work himself.

“The issue is, is that the Housing Association’s immediate default is rather than investigating what’s causing this, it’s immediately they go

to a flow chart of “Are you drying clothes? Are you opening your windows?”

The immediate flow chart is the tenant’s at fault. When I speak to other tenants, they’re faced with the same problems of -“Well, you’re not opening your windows enough, you’re drying clothes in the house”. It’s ridiculous.”

34. He explained that his previous experiences with damp in private rented housing had made him more proactive in reporting problems, as prolonged exposure had once contributed to his son developing asthma. Nevertheless, he felt that delays in identifying the right person to resolve issues remained a significant barrier for tenants. Many tenants, he noted, feel resigned and simply tolerate ongoing problems.

“The problem is, it takes so long to get to the point where you’re getting the right person and for them to ‘make good’. A lot of people think to themselves, “I’ll just put up with it”.

35. He added that because such issues such as blocked drains are not treated as immediate hazards, tenants can wait up to two weeks for a response. Living at the bottom of the street, he regularly experiences drains backing up with raw sewage each summer, requiring repeated visits from contractors such as Drain Force and Welsh Water.

Solutions

- **Tenant rights and responsibilities:** Finally, he questioned whether tenants are sufficiently informed about their rights and responsibilities. While social landlords issue publications outlining what tenants must manage themselves, he felt that tenants’ circumstances vary significantly and housing associations should therefore avoid the one-size-fits-all approach.

Case study 4

36. The tenant moved to Wales in 2022 after experiencing poor housing conditions in her hometown, which left her living in shared accommodation in her mid-50s. She stayed with her daughter for six months before being allocated her current flat in January 2023 – an independent living property managed by

Pobl in Clydach. She has now lived there for three years and is generally happy with her home.

37. A leak emerged without her knowledge. She first became aware of it when it affected her neighbour's property directly below. The housing association responded quickly, identifying the issue as a faulty toilet component and replacing the damaged part. However, the system was old, and only part of it was replaced. This led to repeated issues, including continuous flushing and, later, a flood caused by a leaking stopcock, which she believes may have been a connected issue. As the tenant works full-time, her daughter had to attend the property during repairs. Although the financial impact was minor, the disruption was stressful.

38. She contacted the emergency out-of-houses service and felt confident managing the situation due to her experience as a tenant. She noted that others with more chaotic circumstances might have struggled. The property, now approximately 15 years old, showed signs of wear and tear, and she felt it would have been more efficient for the housing association to replace the full toilet system rather than carry out piecemeal repairs.

39. She experienced no damp or mould issues herself, though the neighbour affected by the leak reported long waits for follow-up work.