

CHI ONWURAH MP
Newcastle upon Tyne Central

24, 7-15 Pink Lane
Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 5DW
Tel: (0191) 232 5838
Email: chi.onwurah.mp@parliament.uk
Twitter: ChiOnwurah

Rt Hon Chris Philp MP
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF
United Kingdom

Via Email

29 July 2021

Dear Chris

RE: Your reply MPAM/0159343/21 on Mears housing for asylum seekers

Thank you for your timely response on the 15/07/2021 on the issues I raised around Mears housing for asylum seekers in my constituency. Unfortunately, my team's own investigations raise a number of questions of the account Mears have provided you.

Firstly, all tenants categorically deny that any one from Mears attended to give notice of, or explain, the works. They also deny they were ever offered alternative accommodation during the works. We asked Mears to provide any evidence that any such meeting took place and they were unable to do so. Is it a requirement for residents to be consulted before work of this kind and what documentation is required to evidence consultation and an offer of alternative accommodation?

Secondly, you correctly state in your letter that an Environmental Health Officer attended the property on the 21st June and that they were happy with the works. The Officer attended at the request of a local councillor after a tenant posted images of the poor state of the house on social media. In the period between the social media posts and the inspection, Mears did improve the conditions of the house. The problem is that they had made little to no effort to in the several weeks between the works finishing and the social media posts, leaving the tenants living in a building site with no timeframe for remedial works. Is it normal practice for Mears to leave tenants in a building site, unless tenants have the courage to make public poor conditions leading local officials to intervene?

Thirdly, you claim in your letter that risk assessments were carried out. I question the validity of an assessment process that said a shell of a house, full of dust and littered with sharp objects is a safe place for people to live especially given one of the tenants has a child that visits the property. What are the factors included in such risk assessments?

Fourthly, if it takes this level of pressure and scrutiny to get Mears to take action to provide a basic standard of housing, it raises the question of what condition other properties are in where tenants lack the courage to speak out. How many complaints are received on accommodation via the AIRE service you mention in your letter?

I am particularly concerned that this case represents wider failings in Mears processes and would appreciate further investigation from your department.

Best regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chi Onwurah". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Chi" and the last name "Onwurah" clearly distinguishable.

Chi Onwurah
Labour MP for Newcastle upon Tyne Central
Shadow Minister for Digital, Science and Technology