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Sent: 23 August 2022 14:27

Subject: self-referral of Uttlesford District Council to the Regulator of Social Housing for possible breaches of the Home Standard

Dear colleagues

I am writing to all staff to let you know that I have today written to the Regulator of Social Housing, making a self-referral of the authority for possible breaches of the Home Standard. I enclose that letter.

This relates to the ongoing and unresolved concerns that the high standards of inspection (and where necessary, remedial works) on two key health and safety indicators (out of six – namely electrical checks and around asbestos management) cannot as of today properly be demonstrated. This does not mean that I believe that any of our c2,800 council houses are unsafe in this regard, but that without a proper reporting regime, I cannot properly satisfy myself that they are properly safe.

For anyone who wants a fuller description of this situation, its history, its management to date, and what is happening next, you can read the second attachment – which is a series of papers published today and due for consideration at the Council's Governance, Audit and Performance Committee on 31st August, and at an additional meeting of the Housing Board in early September.

Of course this will be of concern to our council tenants. I have therefore written yesterday, by first class post, to every council tenant, as well as a similar letter to the much smaller number of leaseholders of council properties (that they bought under the right to buy). I enclose a sample letter, so you can see what tenants have been told directly. It is important that we are both honest and transparent, but also that we give as much reassurance as is possible in these circumstances. This is a hard balance to strike, and your assistance in doing so will be much appreciated in any discussions you have over this. This is particularly important both for housing colleagues, of course, and also for colleagues in customer services, who are gearing up to take calls on the matter.

Let me reassure you that this is the absolute top priority for action in the council, and we have deployed all appropriate resource to remedy the situation speedily, including bringing in additional senior management support into housing to work with our existing team, starting work last Thursday.

As is good practice when we face such issues, I have briefed colleagues in housing on this issue in person this morning. Finding ourselves in this situation is going to be stressful for housing colleagues in particular, but we have a strong team in place with a proud track record, and now supported by extra senior management capacity, and we have a clear plan to see us through this challenge. I don't need to ask all other staff to rally round in support so much as thank you in advance for doing so, as I know that is who you all are as dedicated public servants and supportive colleagues.

We are a good landlord, and that we are popular and well-regarded by our tenants is a tribute to the hard work of many over many years. This current problem notwithstanding, ours is a proud record, and serves as a very strong foundation from which to move forward positively.

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