Residents' Network

Blog



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Awaab's Law: Shaping a brighter future for social housing?

By Dr Eve Blezard, Networks Projects Manager, HQN

Awaab's Law is a powerful response to a deeply felt tragedy, which I believe marks a crucial turning point for social housing. Awaab's Law was passed last summer and requires the government to set out new legal duties for landlords to address serious health hazards such as damp and mould in social homes within a fixed time period.

Although it is already a law, the detail of those time periods has not yet been set and the government are currently consulting on proposals. However, the fact that there will be a law which tenants can use to take their landlord to court if they fail to act goes beyond the practical outcome of fixing issues like damp and mould – I believe it will help change how we value and treat every person who calls social housing their home.

A beacon of hope? I think Awaab's Law could provide hope in the shadow of a heart-breaking event. It reminds us of the heavy price paid when we ignore social housing residents. Born from the tragic loss of young Awaab Ishak, this law is more than just guidelines about fixing homes – it's about changing culture and mindset. It's about truly listening, understanding, and acting with care and empathy.

At its heart, Awaab's Law is about making life better in social housing. It tells landlords they must act quickly and effectively to sort out problems like damp and mould. Here's what's changing:

1. **Quick action:** At the moment there is no legislation to say how quickly landlords must check out and fix serious problems – this will set out the timescales landlords need to stick to
2. **Better homes:** The goal is to ensure everyone lives in a healthy, safe, home free from serious hazards to health such as unsafe stairs, trip hazards which could lead to falls, overcrowding, excess cold, and damp and mould growth
3. **Being responsible:** Landlords must take your worries seriously and sort them out quickly
4. **Changing the culture:** This law aims to ensure that social housing residents are treated better and everyone's voice is heard and valued.

The real cost: The sad stories of Grenfell and Awaab Ishak show us what happens when we don't listen. Working with residents, I've seen how policies often miss the mark and how some views can paint social housing in a bad light. This kind of thinking pushes residents' voices aside and makes it hard for them to be heard.

The Grenfell tragedy struck as I was wrapping up my PhD research, which warns about the dangers of ignoring these voices. It was a clear sign to me that we must bring forward the resident voices that have been ignored for too long. My work, alongside others pushes for a big change in housing policy. I call for everyone to work together—residents, researchers, and housing experts—to build a community that values and listens to its people.

Looking ahead: Awaab's Law needs to be much more than legislation; it's a chance to change how we see and treat social housing communities. The Housing Ombudsman's recent reports highlight the need for an empathetic, more resident-focused approach. This means creating an environment where everyone feels heard, their concerns matter, and their wellbeing comes first. We must now aim for an open, responsible housing sector and, most importantly, treat everyone with dignity.

We need a big shift in how social housing works. Here's what I think could help:

1. **Listen more:** Housing providers must involve residents in improving their neighbourhoods
2. **Break down stereotypes:** We all need to work together to change outdated views about people living in social housing
3. **Rethink policies:** It's time for policies that truly reflect the lives and experiences of residents
4. **Work collaboratively:** Researchers, activists, and housing experts must join forces to make a real difference
5. **Change the culture:** Housing organisations must embrace a culture of listening, respect, and care, ensuring everyone feels seen and heard.

Awaab's Law is a big step forward, pushing for both legal changes and a shift in how we think about social housing. It highlights why it's so important for the housing sector to connect with residents, tackle long-standing issues, and embrace resident centred approaches and continue to keep having conversations about how we move forward.

Many housing providers are already taking steps to involve residents more and ensure their voices are heard. These efforts show a real commitment to following new regulations and building strong, supportive communities. I feel that the Residents Network can contribute to this positive change by raising awareness about the importance of resident-led approaches, empathetic communication and co-regulation. If you have any ideas about how you want to see this achieved, please get in touch: networks@hqnetwork.co.uk

About the author

Dr Eve Blezard is the new networks project manager at HQN and will be leading the Residents' Network. Eve is a community practitioner and has been working in housing since 2009 after beginning her career in criminal justice. She is passionate about how residents' experiences can be heard in ways that help improve services, lives, and communities. In 2022, Eve finished her PhD research, which explored the importance of community and home with social housing residents. At HQN, Eve will draw on her experience of resident feedback and community involvement to focus on supporting members on resident engagement and involvement.

Read more about Eve's research here: https://hub.salford.ac.uk/care-shusu/comm-unity-pilot/ and learn more about the Government guidelines around damp and mould: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/damp-and-mould-understanding-and-addressing-the-health-risks-for-rented-housing-providers/understanding-and-addressing-the-health-risks-of-damp-and-mould-in-the-home--2