

Mr Betts
Chair of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee
House of Commons
SW1A 1AA

23 March 2022

Dear Clive,

We are writing in response to the appearance of our tenant Ms Angela Price and ITV News journalist Mr Daniel Hewitt, at the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee oral evidence session on Monday 14 March 2022.

We reiterate our apology for the conditions that Ms Price and her family experienced following the waste leak in her home in May 2018. There are times when we get things wrong. We are very sorry this happens - we are sorry for any inconvenience or distressed caused to our residents - and we do our best to learn from what has gone wrong.

In Ms Price's case, our initial response to the leak was too slow and not sufficient – it took 24 hours for our contractor to attend to wet-vac Ms Price's home, and 2 days for our drains contractor to first attend. The problem persisted and worsened despite our efforts over the course of the following week.

We recognise that we do make mistakes, and have done so at times in this case. However, in the interests of fairness to the Guinness staff who have worked hard for Ms Price, we think it may be helpful to offer a few points of clarification for the Committee's records, particularly as some of the representations made to the Committee do not align to our records (including some of those made by Mr Hewitt). We are also providing a copy of our statement to Mr Hewitt, as he said he had not re-read it before giving evidence to the Committee. We believe this provides some useful detail regarding both the complexity of the case and our extensive efforts to carry out agreed works to Ms Price's home.

For clarity, we absolutely do not assert that this lessens the seriousness of the situation, and nothing that we are presenting below is intended to dilute our apologies to Ms Price, but Ms Price's case has been a complex one.

In respect of some of the specific points regarding Ms Price's case, as made to the Committee:

- Ms Price instructed her solicitor to bring a Disrepair case very soon (10 days) after notifying us of the leak. Thereafter, at her request, we were restricted (in the main) to communicating through her solicitor. This, and disagreements between Ms Price and her successive property advisors, introduced delays. At the date on which the Disrepair claim was brought, our contractors and colleagues had attended Ms Price's home a number of times and had arranged for her to move to a hotel. We have remained committed throughout to carrying out works agreed with Ms Price's surveyor and to the agreed timetables.
- In addition to the programme of works agreed with Ms Price, we have made a number of offers to clean and treat the mould in Ms Price's home. Until November 2021, these had been declined.
- The basin tap was installed at Ms Price's request despite our engineers advising her that local water pressure meant the model of tap she had chosen to purchase would not work properly.

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- Mr Hewitt discussed with the Committee general issues regarding access to homes and intimated that these applied in Ms Price's case. We recognise his general point, but feel it is not appropriate to suggest it applies here. We tried to arrange access to Ms Price's home repeatedly over a significant period of time (offering hotel accommodation during works as appropriate). This was generally declined, for a range of reasons including health and holidays.

In respect of some more general points made during proceedings, and their applicability to this case:

- We take all complaints very seriously. We do our best to resolve these to our residents' satisfaction. We always advise residents of their right to refer to their complaint to their MP and/or the Housing Ombudsman Service and this is stated clearly in our Complaints Policy which is on our website.
- Our Compensation Policy makes clear that residents are entitled to compensation when we have got things wrong. (We have paid c£15,000 for hotel accommodation for Ms Price and her household during repair works, reimbursed Ms Price for several hundred pounds of incidental expenditure incurred by her following the leak and made an offer of £8,500 in respect of the Disrepair claim.)

We deeply regret the condition of Ms Price's home. We wish to assure the Committee that we have been fully committed to addressing the issues, and are fully committed to providing good service to all our residents at all times, and to taking appropriate and responsive action where we fall short. We listen to our residents – they are the people we are here to serve – and value anything that amplifies the voices of our residents. We welcome the changes set out in the Social Housing White paper, including and in particular stronger consumer regulation.

Ms Price has secured a tenancy with another housing association and latterly given notice on her Guinness home (an earlier tenancy secured with a different housing association did not proceed). Her Disrepair claim against us remains live: we await Ms Price's response to our settlement offer.

I would very much welcome the opportunity to meet you in Westminster or in your constituency to provide you with some further information about our actions in this case, but also on our overall approach to managing homes and services.

You will see below that I am copying this letter to the Committee clerks.

Yours sincerely,



Catriona Simons
Group CEO

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