

Dear Gabrielle,

Thank you for submitting your question to the Housing Policy Committee for its meeting on Friday. I am also pleased you were able to attend the Tenant Voices Matter meeting on Tuesday.

At the committee meeting, I acknowledged your question and agreed to provide you with a written response, which will also go on the public record on the committee website.

You asked, "please can we encourage the Repairs Team to have a Risk Assessed System that prioritises cases based on impending necessity such as damp and mould whilst frontlining general Health and Safety issues and ensure that in the summer months external building maintenance and essential repairs are completed and accounted for?" The Committee has been keen to ensure the right priority for all repairs issues and has been monitoring the performance of the repairs system. Damp and mould have been a top priority, with the council setting up a special Damp & Mould task force. For each disrepair case received by Sheffield City Council, an officer aims to visit within 5 days to carry out a full assessment of the work required. This will take into account any issues with damp and mould and any health and safety or serious issues. This allows us to ensure we place orders for work in the correct category for work to be completed. The repairs and maintenance team are working closely with the Repairs, Policy & Improvement Team, Legal colleagues and respective residents to identify, assess and prioritise all cases of disrepair that may cause a health and safety risk to residents, especially those with ongoing or reported issues of damp and mould, given the seriousness of this emerging issue.

You also asked about "a positive, regenerative initiative for the Housing Team is to look for and offer 'on the job' apprenticeships and encourage and incentivise tenants to become more involved with the care and repair of residential properties and amenities, a start being to provide/offer free educational workshops and roadshows. The Councillors also, potentially have more authoritative profiles who could help to create better connections with celebrities of status to persuade central government to reinvigorate neglected northern counterparts." The committee is keen to see the use of apprentices to provide opportunities for young people and to grow the skills in our workforce. In the Housing & Neighbourhood Service we currently have 30 live apprenticeships working in all aspects of services we deliver, and in the Repairs service we have approximately another 100. Many of the apprentices in the Repairs service carry out their skills training on long term empty properties that need major regeneration work, helping to bring council homes back in to use for general needs housing.

At a national level, councillors and officers highlight the lack of investment in social housing over many decades whenever opportunities arise.

You asked about bee and wildlife corridors with medicinal, herbaceous borders and communal planting areas. The Housing service is trialling some "relaxed mowing" in certain areas to improve naturalisation and create wildlife corridors. As part of the Gleadless Valley Masterplan, work is underway to establish green corridors and meadow development, linking into the ancient woodland that surrounds the area. Outside the remit of the Housing committee, the Communities, Parks & Leisure Committee has set up a working group to look at biodiversity across the council.

Any damaged barriers or fencing controlled by the Housing Service will be addressed if it is causing a health and safety issue. Please do let us know if there are specific instances which need looking at.

You asked about 'designated dog toilet sandpits to reduce the constant issues of dog littering which persists and presides over all the communal park and paving areas.' I agree this is an issue right across the city. The advice from our officers is that designated dog toilet sandpits are not something that have been considered to reduce dog fouling. These may be beneficial for personal use in a garden but would have limited impact across a city. Education around dog fouling, signage and bins that take dog waste are a better approach.

I will also send you the TARA details. I hope this is helpful.

Best wishes,
Douglas

Cllr Douglas Johnson, (Green Party)
City Ward, Sheffield
Chair of Housing Policy Committee