



David Avery, Chair

03 August 2021

Clare Miller, Chief Executive

Clarion Housing Group

By email only

Dear David and Clare

## Eastfields Estate

I write following the regulator's consideration of your referral in relation to conditions on the Eastfields Estate in LB Merton. My colleague, Angela Holden has written to you to confirm that, following our enquiries, we have concluded that we do not have evidence of a breach of the consumer standards. Angela has set out further information in relation to our conclusion.

I acknowledge the constructive engagement and openness in your dealings with the regulator, and the information you have provided. Nonetheless, I wanted to write to you separately and would be grateful if you could bring this letter to the attention of your Board.

Notwithstanding our conclusions, there is no denying the level of shock that the footage aired by ITV News (and previously BBC) has prompted, which has been widely expressed both within and beyond the sector. As regulator, we have found it disappointing to see the poor conditions for tenants that were highlighted. In line with the Governance and Financial Viability standard, registered providers are required to safeguard the reputation of the sector, and it is clear that this has been damaged by recent media coverage. In the case of Clarion, as the largest housing association in the country, that reputational responsibility is particularly acute.

While we have reached a conclusion of no breach, there are a number of actions we would propose, some of which I know Clarion are already considering.

1 I understand that Clarion are undertaking a lessons learned exercise. I would urge you, in the interests of transparency and in recognition of your role as leaders within the sector, to publish the outcome of that exercise, both for the benefit of tenants and in order to share the learning more widely.

2 During our enquiries we have been struck by the absence of cases referred, either by tenants themselves, or by their elected representatives to the Housing Ombudsman. I would urge you to write to all tenants to remind them of the process for raising complaints with Clarion in cases where they are dissatisfied with the service they receive. We are clear, and it is a requirement of our Tenant Involvement & Empowerment standard, that registered providers have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly. That is also a clear aim set out in the Social Housing White paper.

However, where individual service failures or complaints are not being resolved, as you know the Housing Ombudsman can play a role in resolving disputes or investigating complaints which may lead to an order

of redress. I would therefore urge you, in writing to all tenants, to provide information about the Housing Ombudsman service. This is a very important point. There may be instances of individual failure, and it is the role of the Ombudsman to consider redress in such circumstances. Individual tenants may receive a better, and swifter outcome as a result. Across the sector, it is incumbent on all stakeholders to promote, and build confidence in, the systems for resolving issues where they arise – starting with the landlords themselves, with access to the Housing Ombudsman where necessary.

More generally across the sector, it is important to ensure that the system and architecture for putting things right has the confidence of tenants and other stakeholders. This may reduce the need which tenants feel to approach the media or operate through no win no fee lawyers who can have the effect of taking money out of the system, as they perceive they are only listened to if they do so. This approach can divert organisational resources away from resolving the issues, and most importantly, can delay resolution for the individual tenants affected.

3 In terms of communications, I would urge the Board to consider how Clarion engages with the local authorities it operates in, both at executive and political level – whether that is local politicians or Members of Parliament.

As part of our recent and previous regulatory engagement we have seen evidence of Clarion seeking to build constructive relations with local authorities, including at political level. However, we also receive feedback that Clarion can be unresponsive to local authorities, particularly in London. That may not be fair, or it may be an out-of-date perception – but in reputation terms, perception matters. Ultimately, tenants will be better served through open, transparent and accountable relationships at a local level.

I consider there could be value in the Board reviewing the organisational approach to engagement to establish whether there are areas for improvement. In terms of building confidence and trust in Clarion, it is important to seek to build constructive, effective relationships with local and political stakeholders, as you know. Again, I also consider that Clarion has a role to play in that regard in sector leadership terms.

I would be grateful for your views on the suggestions above and I would be happy to discuss the contents of this letter more fully with you or your Board.

Yours sincerely



**Fiona MacGregor**  
**Chief Executive**