

The Daily Telegraph

Military families excluded from Michael Gove's plans to improve housing

Those living in properties provided by the MoD could still face risks of damp and mould

Thousands of military families have been left out of Michael Gove's plans to raise housing standards, [despite living in damp houses](#) which pose a health risk to their children.

The Ministry of Defence provides some 49,000 homes to soldiers and their families. But new laws designed to hold private and social housing landlords to account will not apply to these homes, which are managed by the commercial firm Pinnacle Group.

Experts claim this could be in breach of the military covenant, which says those who serve, or have served, in the armed forces "should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services".

In February, an amendment was made to the Social Housing Bill that will [require social landlords to fix damp and mould](#) in their properties within strict time limits.

Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove added the amendment to the bill, which is in the final stages of becoming law, [after two-year-old Awaab Ishak died](#) from chronic exposure to harmful mould in a Rochdale social housing property.

It forms part of the "Decent Homes Standard", which Mr Gove also intends to apply to private landlords [through the Renters' Reform Bill](#) – a separate bill introduced to Parliament earlier this month.

But military families living in properties provided by the Ministry of Defence fall under neither bill, the Government has now confirmed.

Experts fear this will leave families of those serving in the armed forces disadvantaged and without the same powers as other renters to get long-standing problems fixed.

It comes after organisations representing military families said children's health was at risk due to living in accommodation infested with mould.

Stephen Hodgson, chief executive of the Property Care Association, a trade association, said the lack of laws protecting these families “absolutely runs in the face” of the Armed Forces Covenant.

Mr Hodgson said: “If you are a soldier living in social housing, the bill applies. But if you live in a property managed by the Government, you fall outside. That seems really unfair.

“Lots of military families are living in properties with catalogues of problems. Housing provision is a total lottery. There’s currently no recourse if things go wrong.

“The main issue is damp. These homes are getting old. I know one serving major who went months without a working boiler.

Not all these properties are on UK soil. Many are situated abroad. Mr Hodgson said there were properties in Cyprus “practically falling down”.

He added: “These are family homes. Everyone goes over, not just the soldiers.”

While Mr Hodgson said he was “bowled over” by Mr Gove’s attention to issues of mould and damp after Ishak’s death, he is concerned that military families will not benefit from his campaigning which has seen his department encourage social renters to use the Property Ombudsman.

In 2021, the Ministry of Defence awarded a £144m housing contract for its 49,000 homes to Pinnacle Group.

Two other companies, Amey and VIVO, are responsible for carrying out repairs and maintenance. The contracts came into effect in April 2022.

The maintenance and repair of service family accommodation has “long been an issue”, according to a parliament report published this year.

It said on one day in mid-December 2022, 163 homes had been without heating for over five days. The report also cited “ongoing issues with mould and damp” in some homes.

Last year, the Government commissioned research which showed over half of armed forces personnel were dissatisfied with requests for, and the quality of, maintenance and repair work of their service family accommodation.

The Telegraph reported back in December that the Government was considering scrapping its contract with Pinnacle, after organisations representing armed forces' families claimed "young children's lives have been put at risk" as a result of freezing conditions and "mould growing everywhere".

A Ministry of Defence spokesperson said it has held housing contractors to account and where contracted performance levels are not met, the department has withheld profits.

They added: "Ministers continue to receive regular updates to ensure this performance improves.

"Our Armed Forces personnel and their families deserve high-quality accommodation, and around 97pc of military homes meet or exceed the Government's Decent Homes Standard.

"We invested £185m in 2022/23 to improve our housing standards, following more than 14,000 homes receiving an upgrade in the last two years."