



Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

Claire Perry MP
Minister of State for Climate Change and
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Dear Ms London,

Thank you for your open letter of 21 July, which raised a number of concerns about of housing standards, including on four example estates in London. I would like to apologise for the delay in this response.

We are aware that some district heating schemes are not meeting acceptable standards in relation to technical performance and customer service and we are working with industry to address these. Thank you for sharing details of these particular schemes; it will help us to identify how we can best address these issues more broadly.

The Department is committed to gaining a better understanding of the experiences of people on heat networks and to act appropriately on the evidence. Earlier this year BEIS commissioned a large-scale survey of Heat Network consumers. This was sent to over 5,500 customers on communal or district heating schemes as well as non-heat network consumers, in order to form a comparison group, and is the first government study of its kind. The findings from the research will help us to identify the issues experienced and true extent of customer detriment, as well as highlight the areas where heat networks are working well for consumers. We hope to publish our findings from the survey before Christmas.

It is clear that heat networks will need to play a key role in the long term decarbonisation of heating, as set out in the now published Clean Growth Strategy. Well designed and operated heat networks can provide a cheaper, lower carbon heating solution than separate heating systems in individual dwellings. That is why we are providing £320 million of funding out to 2021 through the Heat Network Investment Project (HNIP) to help create a sustainable market for heat networks in the 2020s where consumers are properly protected.

However, we are also clear that further interventions will be required to deliver the market growth we need to see and to protect consumers as the market expands. That is why an industry task force, representing a range of stakeholders led by the Association for Decentralised Energy (ADE), was set up earlier this year to provide recommendations to Government on how to create an effective long-term framework for the sector. A key focus of this will be on how to deliver strong protections for consumers. Following the publication of the task force's recommendations later this year, the Government will examine the measures, including through regulation, required to deliver the changes required in more detail.

You also raised the issues of housing standards, including energy efficiency and fire safety as this falls within the remit of DCLG. In regard to your concerns about the building standard in the Pembroke Park estate in Hillingdon and the effects this has had on residents; the dwellings on the estate should have complied with all relevant requirements in the Building Regulations, in particular Part L (Conservation of fuel and power) of Schedule 1 to the Building Regulations 2010.

To comply with these standard cavity walls should have been insulated and windows and doors tight fitting to reduce loss of heat, the building control body should have been checking on compliance. However, the duty to comply rests with the developer/builder, where work is found not to comply the liability remains with the developer/builder and a claim may be made in the civil courts up to six years from the date of the completion of the building work.

If they haven't already done so, it is open to residents of Pembroke Park estate to raise their complaints directly with A2Dominion through their official complaints process. I read from your email that residents have already embarked on the next step which is to seek assistance from their local MP in resolving the matter.

Their local MP can refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman where they are unable to resolve the complaint. The Housing Ombudsman can also consider their complaint directly, without a referral, but only if at least eight weeks have passed since the end of the housing association's complaints process. You can find out more about the circumstances in which the Ombudsman will consider complaint and how to complain by following the link:

<http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/> or telephoning them on 0300 111 3000.

Where there is risk to health and safety, tenants could also ask the council to carry out an assessment under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. If the council is aware of a serious hazard, it is under a duty to take appropriate action to address it.

You also spoke about an increase in the cost of service charge to residents; the reasonableness of the service charges that A2Dominion seeks should depend on the nature of the works required and other contributing factors. The law is clear that service charges are payable only to the extent that the costs have been reasonably incurred.

However, there are a number of statutory rights covering service charges. These include the right to be consulted about works proposed by the landlord, and to make an application to the First-tier Tribunal (Property Chamber) to determine the reasonableness of the service charges that are being charged.

Residents of Pembroke Park estate can also obtain some free initial advice and information from the Leasehold Advisory Service (LEASE). This is a specialist body funded by this Department to advice on residential leasehold issues. Residents may wish to contact LEASE on 020 7382 2500 or at Fleetbank house, 2-6 Salisbury Square, London, EC4Y 8JX. By e-mail at: info@lease-advice.org. Further information is available on LEASE's website: www.lease-advice.org

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Claire Perry', written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

CLAIRE PERRY MP
Minister of State