23 MORE CITY WEST HOMES ‘HORROR STORIES’

We thought (and hoped) City West Homes had, at last, turned the corner and was heading for an improved service. How wrong we were!

As this tweet from Karen Buck MP illustrates, City West Homes’ performance continues to create new horror stories for tenants and leaseholders:

“In continuing @CityWestHomes disrepair nightmare stories, a family with school age kids, forced to leave their home after a leak into the fuse box in June, now offered temporary accommodation near Heathrow just as term starts. This is unacceptable.”

This was followed, the next day by Councillor Geoff Barraclough’s tweet:

“Leak from the communal areas affecting four flats at Falkirk House. Water dripping on fuse boxes etc. Residents told by CityWest that a contractor will attend on 18 September. Tenants and leaseholders deserve better for their money.”

So, here are 23 more ‘Horror Stories’ as told to Labour Councillors by City West Homes tenants and leaseholders.

Thankfully, after reporting them to CWH, many of these long-standing issues have now been sorted. But some are still outstanding even though they were reported to CWH many months (and sometimes longer) ago.

Westminster City Council is currently conducting a Review of City West Homes’ performance to which Labour Councillors are contributing.

We hope that this latest batch of ‘Horror Stories’ gives the Review Team further examples of what has gone wrong so that tenants and residents no longer have to endure the appalling level service that is currently on offer from City West Homes.

Westminster Labour Group – September 2018

Horror Story Number 1

Ilbert Street, Queen’s Park

I had a leak from my neighbour upstairs which in turn cut my electrics in my flat, this was reported to City West Homes repairs. I have been contacting City West Homes and sent countless emails of complaint. However, they did send a plumber that day and because they could not gain entry to upstairs the leak could not be stopped. The plumber explained that he would report this immediately. I waited and then had to contact City West Homes and it was confirmed that it was not reported.

I was promised that an electrician would be round to assist with my electrics that same evening and still nothing, I had to contact the out of service repairs, they also confirmed that a job had not been raised for the electrics and they will be sending someone that evening. The electrician turned up at 20.30pm and fixed the electrics on a temporary basis, this now meant that I lost all my electrics in the kitchen, no heating and hot water and I had to run a cable in the passage to keep the fridge going. By then I had been without power for 8 hours. I am without heating and hot water and no electrics in my kitchen.

Both myself and my daughter suffer from health issues, arthritis and asthma. I work full time and my daughter who is 16 years of age have to get up every morning and boil water to have a wash. This is taken a strain and impacting our health, I have sent to complaints to City West and the CEO and no one has responded.
Horror Story Number 2

Dufour’s Place, Soho

I just needed to have my kitchen sink mixer tap replaced. This has been done before with no trouble. But yesterday afternoon was a nightmare. Yesterday what seemed to be a pleasant, very amiable man turned up, but he just couldn't seem to cope - he kept saying he couldn't turn off the stopcocks. I know they are stiff, but they were both replaced some time ago so they are relatively new. He simply couldn't deal with them and went away to get something else to put in instead of the stopcocks, and what worried me was that the whole boxed in area under my sink was looking as though it were getting wetter and wetter. The job seemed to go on for ever and he clearly found it terribly hard, but when it was finished the taps looked nice and he cleaned around them for me, saying I would only have to wipe over the surface beneath the sink with a cloth.

He left and I got down on my hands and knees only to find myself confronted with an absolute flood of water in the area under my sink and whatever I did I found more, and then I saw that there was water pouring out of the U-bend! There'd been nothing wrong with that and I rushed to the phone and called the company and got the plumber back, and he said he must have knocked the U-bend out of place when he was doing the other work!

He put putty around either side of it, where it fits into the pipe, which has never ever been done before and is no way to leave a U-bend in any way secure. I have reported all this and been told it must be put right, but frankly after this experience I dread it!

Worst of all was having to crawl around on my knees for hours after cleaning up all the water, an inch deep, and dry everything, and clean up the bits of putty that were mixed with everything too. I had to throw things away, and have never ever been left in such a situation.

Also, when the plumber arrived I asked whether he had a dust sheet, not because of dirt but because my kitchen flooring marks easily and I knew sharp tools might scratch it. He said it wouldn't be necessary, and I wish I had simply put down a sheet or cloth of my own, because his spanners and things have left deep cuts in the flooring.

Although this man had a pleasant manner and couldn't apparently have been nicer, I have never known a plumber leave me with such a flood and so afraid that the water will start coming out of the U-bend again that I am in a terrible state.

Horror Story Number 3

Droop Street, Queen’s Park

I am very concerned that I have had to chase this job up since March 2018. The back gate to my garden which lead on to my property has rotted away at the bottom and the frame to the door is rotten away from the wall because of the bad weather in March (Snow). It is a security risk and the door can be easily kicked open and someone can gain access to my property.

I have had to raise two jobs numbers because the job numbers where lost. I have try contact my housing officer but she now ignoring my emails. I have a member of your team, telling me that emails have been send, we are waiting on the contractors to get back to us etc etc.

It is now the middle of June 2018 and as of this morning, you are waiting on the commercial team to authorise the order so the works can be carried out. Can someone please tell me what is going on and when will the door frame and garden gate will be replaced?
Horror Story Number 4

Wellington Road estate, St John's Wood

I don’t seem to be getting anywhere with my questions around the parking on the Wellington Road Estate, despite asking for clarifications for around a year now. The standard response is that the cost of putting up a barrier is being investigated...

In fairness, on one specific occasion, a car which both my husband and I reported as parking without authorisation, for weeks at a time, over quite some months, resulted in a DVLA check by CityWest, and a resulting letter being sent to the registered owner. Unfortunately, this car is now parking in our courtyard again...

Overall, I feel that, given we are paying for the right to park here, we should be able to do so. Currently, anyone who wants to shop in St. John’s Wood, watch a cricket match, or simply can’t find street parking, picks the easy alternative to park in our parking area. It’s free, and no-one is there to stop them. I admit that I am finding it increasingly difficult to understand why, given we pay, there is such reluctance to monitor the area at least a good few times a week, and to make it clear that unauthorised parking will not be tolerated.

Of note, a few years back our former caretaker used to walk through/ check the parking area a number of times a day. He had notices which he used to post on unauthorised cars. It was effective. No laws were broken. Drivers were simply made aware that if they aren’t allowed to park in this area, they shouldn’t.

Finally, some good news! In August 2018, residents were told by CWH:

“I am writing to confirm that funding has been approved for a barrier gate at Elgood & Boyton House and that I have written to our contractors today asking they now progress this work. Once I receive a time frame I will get back to you.”

Horror Story Number 5

Chippendale House, Churchill Gardens

Dear Leader of the Council,

As you haven’t responded, I thought that I would let you know because as you know, now the election is over no one cares. I would be interested to know whether Cllr Aitken even sees these emails. We have had no contact from City West Homes but my Mother received a phone call from Morgan Sindall. They have arranged to come in and paint her ceiling. Perhaps you can enlighten us? Why would you be repairing the ceiling when the leaking problem hasn’t been dealt with – it’s a waste. Why don’t you fix the leak? There are more leaks running outside the building in the back now. Whilst this isn’t coming through the flat as it is going down the outside it is still a worrying problem. One day you might listen to residents. Frankly I hoped for more responsiveness in the current climate but I guess I was wrong – a 92 year old woman stressed by the actions of a local authority. It’s shameful.

Two weeks later………..

I find myself writing again disgusted by your lack of customer services, politeness, respect and compassion by choosing to ignore my emails and the plight of my mother. They came to repair and paint the ceiling; they plastered it and that is the last she has seen of them – no painting. The water is still leaking… but no one at City West Homes nor the Leader of the
Council cares. TMO and Council not caring or listening sounds very familiar. I have cc’d the leader of the opposition in the hope that this might trigger some kind of action. I miss the days when Councils were accountable

**Horror story Number 6**

**Vale Royal House, Charing Cross Road**

What constitutes an emergency repair? Resident was left waiting for repairs 5 days until leakage damaged floor, kitchen and leaked to floor below

Mr B would like to ask why blocked pipe was not treated as an emergency as it caused flooding in his kitchen and storeroom and consequently leaked to the flat below his? This problem was reported on Thursday morning at 9am last week. One of the contractors turned up on Friday and as an excuse of not being able to complete the job stated that they could not find the parking space to bring in adequate equipment. This leakage of waste water created a health hazard and foul smell, which Mr B, who has serious health condition, had to endure until Monday evening when another contractor turned up and resolved the issue.

As a result of this leakage, there was permanent damaged of the kitchen elements and the floor. Also, Mr B could not use his kitchen sink for five days.

**Horror Story Number 7**

**Kennet House, Church Street**

What is going on with this repair?

I have need to inform you that the second of the 2 heat store storage heaters (both installed same day) has been faulty for several months now of which Morgan Sindell are aware of and have done nothing to rectify/repair it but still seem to be dithering.

The faults;

- This heater intermittently omits a burning electrical/oil smell (blackened wallpaper) which a neighbour witnessed.
- This heater is not holding the heating charge, consistent with cracked bricks and starts cooling from early morning charge until cold regardless of settings -3 elements not heating evenly?
- Still no control knobs. One electrician (1 knob broken by him) said I now have to use a spanner or pliers to change the controls or find a shop that sells thermostats which may have similar type size knobs to buy. Is this correct? The knob fixings are very brittle and fall apart

I ought to remind you that a vulnerable 94 year old woman (mother) resides here and needs this heater restored to what it should be. I ask for this to be treated with urgency and not to become an 11 week ordeal/saga like the previous one
Horror Story number 8

Ingrebourne House, Church Street

I am emailing for the fourth time since April 2018 regarding the standards of cleaning in Ingrebourne House.

Since our old cleaner retired at the end of March the cleaning here has been very poor. My emails are falling on deaf ears, CWH do not reply, Pinnacle resolve issues retrospectively, this is not good enough.

Over the weekend we had no cleaner. The silver paladin bins at the front of Ingrebourne House have been left outside the block, leaving no bins in the chute room. All the rubbish is falling onto the floor. Residents are piling rubbish outside by the recycling bins. See photos taken on Sunday, it was much worse this morning.

Our new cleaner started this morning at 10am. This is not acceptable. I have also raised concerns that he does not speak English and therefore we cannot communicate issues with him, this is also not acceptable.

Why is our cleaning not being actioned, we pay for this service through our rent and the current standards are not worth paying for.

Why are CWH not dealing with this issue, not replying to emails and doing the basic standards of service we expect??

Please can I have an appropriate response, this issue has been going on for 4 months now and it's not being resolved. We need a good cleaner who can communicate with residents.

Horror Story Number 10

Birch House, Avenue Gardens Estate

I am a resident at Birch House. I have experienced flooding to my property twice since Good Friday and CWH response has been very poor. In fact, I was left without electricity in the affected room for over 3 months. When I am flooded the water pours through an electric light fitting which, I’m sure you can appreciate, is incredibly dangerous. My whole flat now smells of damp and the situation is no nearer to being resolved. We are also having ongoing issues with the complete breakdown of the communal heating and hot water with temporary generators in use for years now!
Horror Story Number 11

Rothley Court, Wharncliffe Gardens

I am sending you photos taken yesterday of my bedroom ceiling leak from the roof of Rothley Court, 22 St. John's Wood Road. On the 25th of July I was advised that the roof repairs had been completed and the scaffolding removed from the courtyard below in Pinner Court. Obviously, this was not done. With the heavy rain of the past few days my ceiling is now a lot worse, the stains are spreading, the paper is peeling off exposing mould beneath and water is dripping down the wall.

After four months of frustrating phone calls, waiting in for staff to inspect, and emails, I am about to pay for legal advice. This is the 4th time in the past 6 years this roof has leaked and my ceiling and wall once again will cost me a great deal to strip, dry, reseal and repaint. I am more than frustrated. I am very angry with CWH. Obviously, their contractors are not doing their job.

Please advise whoever is responsible that this matter is urgent and needs to be fixed immediately.

Horror Story Number 13

Joseph Conrad House, Lillington Gardens

Ms A has historically had problems with water penetration into her flat, dating back eleven years, which have made her ill and have prevented her from working ever since. She has, therefore, had much contact with CWH over the years.

She has no cooking facilities. When her kitchen was fitted there was an inadequate amount of space left to fit a standard size cooker. At the time of fitting this was not a problem as she had a smaller cooking appliance. She has since ordered five different standard size cookers, all of which have had to be returned. The precise problem is a lack of depth, due to waste pipes running across the back of the wall, which prevent the cooker from slotting into place.

Horror Story Number 14

Joseph Conrad House, Lillington Gardens

Ms A has been without her shower for three weeks now. She has a walk in disabled shower which is not draining properly. She contacted CWH in the first instance. She was then contacted by a contractor called Effectable. She was then contacted by an operative on 17th July 2018, but subsequently had no further contact until 23rd July 2018, when her daughter called the contractor. On 26th July 2018, the contractor replaced a handbasin in the bathroom, some work was done to the shower, but it still does not work. A contractor is due to call this on 27th July, hopefully, to complete the job.
Ms A is extremely distressed, firstly because she has not had a shower for three weeks, in this hot weather and secondly, because she has had to battle with the contractor to get the work started this week.

**Horror Story Number 15**

**Parkinson House, Lillington Gardens**

Ms B had water penetration into her living room (studio flat) for several weeks between 25th January and sometime in March 2018. She has called CWH (Churchill Gardens Office) every day regarding the necessary remedial work. She is constantly informed that she will be contacted, but nobody contacts her.

**Horror Story Number 16**

**Lisson Grove**

Since last summer when we had the combi boiler installed and the initial hiccups with it, the system has been working well enough. Morgan Sindall contacted us a couple of times early in the year to arrange the annual check but agreed, as the system had only recently been installed, they would “calendar” the appointments to correspond with the new system, ie service due around August annually.

We received a call from them in July to arrange an appointment and agreed the boiler check for 5th July, between 8-1. No-one turned up, we were not contacted, no explanation / no apology.

We recently received a letter offering an appointment for 21st August, pm this time, which I put in my diary. Then my husband received a text from an unknown source which he deleted as he did not recognise the number. He then received another text from the same source "msps" which he opened and said we had an appointment for 21st August between 8-1!

As I had a mobile number for “Helen” from Morgan Sindall, I texted her to say that, as we had been let down on the July appointment and my husband had been receiving unsolicited texts from someone, we required a 2 hour slot appointment and were not prepared to wait in all day as we had last time. I suggested either 2-4pm or 4-6pm on 21st August. I had no reply.

Yesterday we were at home and by 3.30pm no-one had turned up, but I then received a call checking the engineer was to call. I told the lady we would be at home until 4pm but could not guarantee later than that as no-one had confirmed either appointment slot. The engineer did not turn up even though we stayed in until 6pm anyway.

My husband has just come back from visiting the local CityWest Homes office on Lisson Green Estate and the member of staff was unhelpful and disinterested, repeatedly telling him that we had to ring the number on the contractor's letter to arrange another appointment! He explained that this had been a waste of time on 2 occasions and that he was making a complaint about the contractor, but the member of staff wouldn't even write down the details.

This is an appalling service. We have observed our duties by agreeing appointments and do not feel we should make any further efforts. Should an engineer be in the area and it is convenient for us to admit him to carry out his duties, fine, otherwise he will need to call another time.
Horror Story Number 17
Glasgow House, Maida Vale

For the past five days, we have been subjected to a continuous flood from the flat directly above, who appear to be away on extended holidays.

Repeated calls and please to the managing agent, City West Homes met with nothing but dogma, contempt and outright refusal to help. The excuse is that they have no access, where in actual fact they do, for what is a council owned flat.

I have an ill child who is unable to cope with the living conditions. We simply cannot live like this anymore; and this is saying nothing of damage to our belongings and valuables. My call today to the managing agent met with nothing less than contempt and disdain, the comment being that they they'll repair my flat in due course.

Horror Story Number 18
Mozart Estate, Queen’s Park

Again, my ceiling is leaking and it is not raining outside. This has been happening for the past 3 years. The tenant living in the property on top is a leaseholder so she has to fix the issue first before they can fix my ceiling. A fan has been put in my home to stop the mould from growing but it has tripped my lights and now I have no lights in my home.

Horror Story Number 19
Severn Avenue, Queen’s Park

There is leak in our flat. The repairs opened the above to check, this was on 4/02/2015. They had access to Flat 5 above but the leak is not coming from there. The repairs had access to Flat 6. They said there were some patches in the middle but couldn't get it where the water came from. From that time until today nothing has been done. If we report they come and check it, promise to come back but they do not. It is not only this part, the flat is full of mould, my bedroom, my son's bedroom, my bathroom. I have been complaining about mould since 2009.

Horror Story Number 20
Kilburn Lane

I live in Kilburn Lane and recently had a wet room installed. In June/July of this year mould has now started growing which has now developed into mushrooms growing. I have contacted City West Homes numerous times now and an officer from the council has been to inspect the property and said they would get someone out to fix the problem. I am constantly chasing this matter and not getting as response. I am constantly being met with various excuses and now they are not responding to my emails.

Horror Story Number 21
Westbourne Gardens, Bayswater

Ms C was written to on 6/10/14 about proposed internal and external decoration which was to take place in 2016 but which has not happened. The house is now in a poor state and requested repairs are not being carried out. On 28/06/18 she reported that her doorbell and entry phone were not working and was given a reference and told it would be fixed in 3 days. This did not happen. She reported it again on 18/08/18 and was given a reference and told
it would be fixed by Friday. Again, this did not happen. I quote her letter, “I am 85 years old and live in the top flat - when I will be too weak to come down to open the door, no amount of reference numbers will help!”

### Horror Story Number 22

**Falkirk House, Maida Vale**

I have been experiencing a dangerous leak into my property for the past 2 weeks. There has been water dripping onto my electrical box on and off over the past week. I called CWH emergency services and they sent a contractor round on 19th August 2018 - he put a bin bag over my electrical box. His advice to me was if it gets worse - switch off the power.

I have spoken with the tenants at Flat A above me and they too have a massive leak in their flat which is falling onto their electrical box. I have also spoken with the leaseholder from Flat B and he informed me that he has had his plumber out to his property to investigate whether the cause of the leak is coming from his flat. Flat B’s plumber has confirmed it is not. The leak is coming from the mains - either there is a problem with the re-washer mains stopcock or there is a leak from a water pipe coming from inside the wall.

I have been told that City West is fully aware of the ongoing problems with leaks at Falkirk House and that this problem has been going on for the past year. Why is no one from City West Homes investigating the cause of this leak?? The lack of care coming from City West Homes is honestly disgusting. Everyone I speak to passes the buck and no-one actually wants to help.

For your information - the tenants at Flat B MOVED OUT of the flat because the problems with damp were so bad. I mean how can City West Homes sit back and do NOTHING?

A week later……………

I am writing to you in a state of desperation. City West Homes sent contractors to my flat, flat A and flat B today. They supposedly knocked on the door for these properties and when no-one answered, they walked away. I contacted the tenants of Flat A myself after coming home from work at 7pm - they informed me that they had been in their flat all day. The door had not even been knocked nor had anyone tried to contact them. I was also told by the Flat B tenants that they were in their flat all day until 5pm and that no-one knocked on their door either. Why would you attend someone’s property without even calling them but expecting them to be in? Is it not common sense to call the person in the flat beforehand? What was the point?

I am literally at my wits end with trying to get City West Homes to arrange for a contractor to source this leak. I find it infuriating that City West Homes and Morgan Sindall send contractors to properties without even calling the tenants or leaseholders before going to their property. How can they expect people to be in their flats all day? I work in central London, the least CWH could have done is to call me before the contractors came. I would have gladly rushed home to let them in.

CWH is breaching their obligations as my landlord under my lease. I cannot even keep my property in a good state of repair if the Landlord doesn't try and stop this leak. The fact that it is coming from a communal area should be reason enough to begin investigating the source. But it seems CWH is not interested in actually helping residents - they pass the buck, they delay, they are rude and they are the most unhelpful organisation I have ever dealt with.
Horror Story Number 23

York Mansions, Chiltern Street

It’s now lunch time and no one has turned up to continue the works on my windows as part of the major works programme which has been going on for over 3 years. I returned from my holidays last night (one of the most expensive weekends for flights) to be here to give access to contractors as agreed with CWH on 1st August. The gross mismanagement of my window situation by middle and senior CWH managers is disgraceful, unprofessional, disrespectful and poor value for money. CWH already owe me over £10,000 for lost earnings due to their incompetence.

The organisation appears to be in complete meltdown. How can Westminster Council allow this to go on? Can you or one of your colleagues let me know what is happening? What do residents who have tried to engage with CWH have to do to get anything done?