



**Suzanne Muna**

Secretary

The Social Housing Action Campaign

[shac.action@gmail.com](mailto:shac.action@gmail.com)

**The Rt Hon Marcus Jones MP**

Minister of State

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

House of Commons

London SW1A 0AA

By email to: [marcus.jones.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:marcus.jones.mp@parliament.uk)

21 July 2022

Dear Mr Jones

*cc: Fiona MacGregor, The Regulator of Social Housing*

**Open Letter re: Clarion Housing Group Closing Down**

We write on behalf of members of the Social Housing Action Campaign (SHAC) living in Clarion Housing Group properties. We are asking for Government to urgently intervene in the governance of Clarion after it shut down most of its services on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2022 following a cyber attack.

Services have not yet been restored and the organisation has yet to provide a date for doing so.

For over a month since the attack, Clarion tenants have been unable to use online services to request a repair, report anti-social behaviour, make queries in relation to rents or service charges, or get help with finances. They cannot access information about the landlord, for example on estate regeneration, performance measures, or finances. They cannot get through by telephone, or use the online chat facility.

The information being sent by Clarion has been sporadic, patchy, and contradictory. For example, some tenants are being told to continue paying their rents through their regular Direct Debits, others have been told to switch to an account with a number consisting entirely of zeros.

Continued ...

## **SHAC Open Letter re: Clarion Housing Group Closing Down**

In both cases, the online rent app is not always updating, therefore tenants and residents cannot be certain their payments are being processed. Yet others have been told to set aside rent payments until the IT issues are resolved.

Further, our members believe that their data has been breached, although Clarion has not confirmed that this is the case. Respondents to a poll identified that 84% had suffered an increase in phishing activity. In one case, a tenant received 31 phishing messages in three weeks. Before then, he reported one or two per month. Another member has just received notice that a third credit card has been opened and used in her name in the last two weeks.

Despite being unable to confirm whether or not a breach had taken place, Clarion has shown just how deeply irresponsible it is by failing to advise tenants and residents on how to protect themselves just in case, or what to do if their identity is stolen.

Some of our members, tenants and residents of Clarion, have reported deep concerns as they are especially vulnerable. These members are in witness protection programmes or fleeing domestic abuse and now live in a heightened state of fear.

It is clear that Clarion relies heavily on digital systems for communicating with tenants and residents, and for carrying out a number of separate procedures. It is clear that these services are essential to maintaining a reasonable standard of life. It is clear that despite being aware of this, Clarion had not sufficiently prepared for a major systems outage of this nature. The responsibility for this failing lies ultimately with the board.

Clarion has been hit by repeated scandals over the last two years.

Between April and May 2022, the Housing Ombudsman Service made two severe maladministration findings against Clarion in the space of just over two weeks. It then launched an investigation into systemic governance failings.

These actions prompted then Housing Secretary, the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, to write an unprecedented letter openly critical of Clarion's inability to meet fundamental standards for tenants.

In the previous year, Clarion had featured regularly on ITV Housing Stories. This and other media outlets reported widespread problems with damp, mould, disrepairs, and infestations in Clarion homes. This included the 500-home Eastfield Estate. Clarion had ignored most repairs requests and cancelled much of their cyclical maintenance when it received a waiver from the Decent Homes Standard for the estate in 2014.

Our members ask that the Minister of State use his powers of office to remove and replace the Clarion board with competent governors in the immediate future, and engage with tenants and residents over the long-term future of the organisation.

Continued ...

## **SHAC Open Letter re: Clarion Housing Group Closing Down**

We have copied the Regulator of Social Housing as the agency which also has powers to intervene in the governance of a provider under extreme circumstances. Our members consider both the current and historic failings at Clarion extreme.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Regards

Suzanne Muna

**Secretary**

**The Social Housing Action Campaign**

[shac.action@gmail.com](mailto:shac.action@gmail.com)

[www.shaction.org](http://www.shaction.org)

[www.facebook.com/groups/www.shaction.org](https://www.facebook.com/groups/www.shaction.org)

@HAWRNet @ActionShac