

## WALWORTH

**84-YEAR-OLD EDITH WAS:**

- Left alone on deserted Aylesbury Estate
- Her nursing staff visited her in pairs for their own safety
- Left with no hot water, no lights downstairs and flat infested with mice
- Twice a victim of burglary

**BEFORE**

- finally being told she was to be evicted from her new property

**MY SIX MONTHS OF MISERY**

By Amelia Burr

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**AN ELDERLY disabled woman is seeking compensation after being forced to live in fear and squalor in a deserted block while a housing association and the council took six months to move her.**

Edith Kelly moved into Chiltern block on the Aylesbury before the last lick of paint had gone on in 1974 and raised her three children there. The 84-year-old widower, who is now wheelchair-bound, said the last year since she was told she would have to move out to make way for the regeneration had been "bloody murder."

Peabody Housing Trust offered Edith a flat in their new Darwin Court sheltered housing unit in Walworth, in March, but she was unable to move in until a disabled accessible bathroom had been fitted.

Peabody started charging Edith rent on her new place in March, even though she had not moved in. As Housing Benefit cannot pay out on two properties at the same time, Edith went into arrears at Darwin Court, leading Peabody to slap her with an eviction notice and threaten legal action before she had even got in the door.

"It's been horrendous," said Edith, who says her visits from the District

Nurse on the Aylesbury over the last six months had to be done in twos for their own safety because the block was considered unsafe. Edith also had her hot water cut off to fix a leak, had her downstairs lights switched off to fix an electrical fault and had mice running all over the flat.

"It's just unbelievable. They were happy to let her stay here without electricity or hot water," said Edith's daughter, Sue Sims, who has been fighting to speed up her mum's move for months.

"It's awful that they could leave her here in those conditions," added Sue, 58, who described the landing outside the flat after dark as "the black hole of Calcutta" when the lights were either broken or removed.

Edith's flat was broken into a month ago while she was in bed upstairs, when hers was one of the only properties not to have been welded up in her block. Sue moved her mum in with her in Bermondsey straightaway, even though she did not have the facilities to look after her properly there. Two weeks later the thieves came back and ransacked the flat, stealing or breaking most of Edith's belongings. A police officer investigating the case told Sue in an email: "It is clear that her address is being targeted due to the state of the building and no one else living there."

"I'm absolutely disgusted at the way they've treated my mum," said Sue of

Peabody and Southwark Council. "No one seems to listen and they don't talk to each other."

All of this has taken its toll on Edith, who had never wanted to move from her family home. "She's terribly depressed and very tearful. I've heard her say to the nurses 'why don't you give me a tablet?'" said Sue. "What was meant to be her twilight years have turned into this and you can't get that back. Mum's never going to fully recover from this."

Peabody have now agreed to quash the eviction and refund all the money Edith paid towards her rent at Darwin Court before she was able to move in, totalling £1200.

"We regret the distress and worry that this situation caused Mrs Kelly," said a spokesperson for the Trust. "We are sorry that we were not able to resolve the issues much more quickly. We hope she will be very happy in her new home."

Cllr Richard Livingstone, Southwark's cabinet member for housing, said the council was also "very sorry about the difficulties and distress Mrs Kelly has been through over recent months."

He said Edith received support from her designated housing officer and through the Creation Trust, who Sue agreed had been a "God send" after they intervened when Edith was served with the eviction notice.

Residents of the estate have a



**Burglars broke in while she slept upstairs**

**Damp and infestation in Edith's bathroom was just one of her many problems**



designated housing officer to provide support and they also receive regular update newsletters, visits and dedicated wardens, who prioritised the block.

"Unfortunately, we did not envisage that Peabody would need to take as long to complete the necessary works, although we have intervened as much as we could to speed this up," he added. "We have successfully supported the majority of residents through this relocation move

and it is therefore extremely unfortunate that Mrs Kelly's situation, especially as a vulnerable resident, was not able to be resolved more quickly."