



Policy Name: **Dealing with Damp and Mould Policy**

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Damp & Mould Policy

Introduction

In October 2021, the Housing Ombudsman issued a “Spotlight on Damp and Mould”, highlighting the approach they expect social landlords to take when dealing with complaints about damp to them. The Housing Ombudsman has been adopting a more proactive approach to dealing with complaints and in line with Government direction is working much more closely with the Regulator for Social Housing in preparation for new legislation being brought by the Government based on the Social Housing White Paper.

This Policy has been developed to sit alongside and complement our Responsive Repairs and Voids Policies.

We want to do everything we reasonably can to make sure our residents stay safe, healthy and well in their homes. Damp and mould are issues which can have a serious impact on the health and well-being of our residents, and cause damage to homes.

This policy sets out our approach to dealing with damp and mould in our homes and communal areas. It covers the services we provide to customers who rent their home under a tenancy agreement and those who occupy under a licence.

Due to the diversity, age and construction of our Housing Stock some properties will need more attention than others, in regards to maintenance and varying levels of management for damp and mould conditions. For leaseholders and shared owners, we will meet the responsibilities as set out under the terms of the lease, and shared ownership agreements.

Policy

Our policy is that we will:

- Provide dry, safe homes for our residents which are free from any hazards
- Comply with legislative, regulatory and contractual (including tenancy and lease) obligations
- Treat residents reporting damp and mould with empathy and respect; we will not prejudge the cause of the damp
- Take responsibility for diagnosing and resolving damp and mould in a timely and effective way where the problem is a result from issues that require repair
- Support residents on resolving damp and mould where they result from the use of the home, and provide our residents with appropriate, clear, sensitive, practical and accessible advice
- Communicate with our residents clearly and regularly regarding any actions we plan to take and any actions our residents are advised to take concerning damp
- Ensure staff are trained to enable them to spot potential causes of damp, mould and condensation so they can advise residents,

diagnose problems and provide solutions

- When applying this policy, make reasonable adjustments for people who have a disability and will take into account the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

Our staff and contractors will work together with our residents to deliver this policy.

The policy supports the delivery of the following strategic objectives:

- To be a customer service organisation
- To provide high quality and safe homes
- To meet our legal and regulatory requirements.

Causes

Mould is a type of fungus. It spreads through spores, which are invisible to the naked eye but are in the air around us all of the time and can quickly grow on surfaces where dampness persists or water has formed, into a visible covering.

Dampness is an excess of moisture that can't escape from a structure, which can also go on to cause significant damage to the building such as collapsed ceilings and rotten timber elements, such as windows and doors.

There are four main causes of dampness in homes in England. It is important to understand the difference between them because they each need different solutions:

- **Water leaks** from defective supply and waste pipework (especially in bathrooms and kitchens) can affect both external and internal walls and ceilings. The affected area looks and feels damp to the touch and stays damp regardless of the prevailing weather conditions. It is the result of a problem or fault with the home, which requires repair. Who is responsible for the repair depends on where and why the leak happens.
- **Rising damp** is caused by water rising from the ground into the home. Water gets through or around a defective damp proof course (DPC) or passes through the masonry that was built without a DPC. Rising damp will only affect basements and ground floor rooms; it will be present all year round but can be more noticeable in winter. It is extremely uncommon but is generally the result of a problem or fault with the home, which requires repair. This will usually be the landlord's responsibility.
- **Penetrating damp** appears because of a defect in the structure of the home, such as damaged brickwork, missing roof tiles, loose flashing or leaking rainwater goods. These defects allow water to pass from the outside to the floors, walls or ceilings. Penetrating damp is far more noticeable following a period of rainfall and will normally appear as a well-defined 'damp-patch' which looks and feels damp to the touch. It is the result of a problem or fault with the

home, which requires a repair. Who is responsible for the repair depends on what the fault is and where it happens.

- **Condensation** is the most prevalent type of dampness and is caused by moisture in the air (water vapour) inside the dwelling coming into contact with a colder surface, such as a window or wall. The drop in temperature causes liquid water to form on the surface and then soak in. It is usually found in kitchens, bathrooms, the corners of rooms, on north facing walls and on or near windows – all places that either tend to have a lot of moisture in the air, or to be cold generally. It is also found in areas of low air circulation such as behind wardrobes and beds, especially when they are pushed up against external walls.

All homes in England can be affected by condensation because the climate is often cool and wet. Normal household activities also constantly release moisture into the air. Good practice in the home minimises and alleviates condensation, and in many cases will prevent it causing dampness and persistent mould. However on occasion the root cause can be a problem that requires a repair or an improvement to the home. In others, a different solution may be needed (for example, in cases of severe overcrowding).

Further detail

Preventative action

We will take action to identify homes that have, or may be at risk of developing, problems with damp and mould. We will use data on our households and homes to help us understand the risk profile in relation to damp and mould. We have lettable standards for our properties and ensure these delivered, before letting.

We will seek to mitigate any increased risk of damp and mould arising as a result of our work to decarbonise our homes.

When a property becomes vacant, and prior to re-letting, we will seek to identify and remedy any issues which may cause damp. This may include ensuring doors and windows are serviceable and can effectively ventilate the property, ensuring extractor fans are working well, as well as applying mould treatments where necessary.

We will provide information on our website, and through other channels, to raise awareness about the causes of damp and mould. This will include details about how everyday activities in the home can generate condensation and what residents can do to help prevent damp through, for instance, ventilation, controlling the build up of moisture and adequate heating. Where there is mould growth, we will provide advice on how this could be treated.

Our staff and contractors will have the skills and knowledge to identify signs of damp and mould and discuss with residents how to manage the problem. Staff will be encouraged to look out for signs whenever they visit a resident's

home.

Dealing with damp and mould

Residents are required to report any problems to us as soon as possible after noticing a problem. When we receive a report, a representative from our maintenance team or our repair contractor will attend the property to investigate causes of damp and mould conditions for consideration on appropriate remedial actions to take. In some cases, they may need to further diagnose the problem to determine whether it is due to a repair issue for which we are responsible. Sometimes finding out what's causing damp and mould isn't always straightforward and could be due to a combination of factors. Any repairs that are required to be carried out will be dealt with in accordance with our Responsive Repairs Policy.

Where damp is as a result of condensation, we will work with our residents to take appropriate measures to prevent the damp and mould occurring. This might include advice about how to control moisture levels or increase ventilation or heating, so that damp levels are kept low. Where we provide such advice, it is important that residents adhere to it and do not take actions that could accentuate any problems e.g. by turning off ventilation systems or sealing over air vents.

When a particularly severe or recurring damp or mould issue a representative from our maintenance team will undertake a comprehensive risk assessment which might result in a range of actions to support the resident depending on the circumstance of the particular issue the resident faces.

We will keep residents informed of any property inspections, diagnosis of issues and the programming of works, where these are required. This includes explaining to them why work might be needed and what work might be done. If any changes to the programme of works are needed, we will keep them informed. Where work is not required, residents will be informed and we will explain the reason why no further work is needed and the steps they should take.

For more complex cases, and especially where more intrusive building work is required and/or there is a serious health risk to the resident or a member of their household, we may require them to move out of their home. We will consider the individual circumstances of the resident. We will ensure that appropriate checks are carried out at the property to ensure it is ready for the resident to return to.

Our tenancy (leasehold and shared ownership) agreements require customers to allow us (including appointed contractors) access to their home to carry out works at the agreed appointment time. If we are unable to gain access and the integrity of the property, its fabric and/or the safety of the customer or those in the vicinity of the property is compromised, we will take appropriate action. For example, this may include, but is not limited to, obtaining an injunction for access.

In line with our Compensation Policy, we will pay compensation where we are legally liable and any claims for damages to belonging or personal injury will be dealt with by our insurance department.

Supporting our residents

We will give residents advice on how to prevent damp and what they should do to remove mould. However, we recognise that not every resident will be in a position to resolve damp and mould themselves. We will provide appropriate support in such cases in relation to the specific circumstances and the individual customer's needs.

We know that some residents struggle to afford to heat their homes adequately so we will work with them to ensure they are guided to all the help and support available from various funding initiatives including those offered by the financial inclusion team.

Where homes are overcrowded humidity will tend to be higher and this increases the likelihood of condensation. Where Damp and mould is found, we will consider a range of solutions which may include the use of ventilation or dehumidifiers. We will provide advice to the tenant about exploring other solutions which may be available, which may include finding alternative accommodation in the private sector and/or making an application to the housing register. Their priority for a move will be in line with the Allocations policy). Where a risk assessment has been carried out and it is found that we need to move the resident out to carry out repairs we may look to provide temporary accommodation on a short term basis. Where a resident needs a longer decant for the work to be completed, the resident will be offered accommodation only on a like for like basis.

Staff training

We will ensure that our maintenance and repairs staff (whether in house or our contractors) will have the required skills to diagnose and remedy damp and mould.

Responding to complaints and learning lessons

We aim to resolve complaints as quickly as possible without residents needing to resort to disrepair claims and legal action. Where legal action is taken, we will follow the Pre-Action Protocol for Housing Condition Claims so that we may resolve the dispute outside of court to help ensure issues are resolved quicker for customers.

We will learn lessons from damp and mould cases, update our technical approach and how we communicate with residents, in order to improve future responses.

Monitoring & Quality Assurance

We will ensure that every case of Damp mould or condensation is managed appropriately and actions/ advice/help & support is offered to each household in accordance with this policy. There will be lead officers to monitor this.

Monthly KPI reports will be developed to track the volume of cases and to monitor compliance with this policy from April 2023 onwards.

Period of review

Our review programme is driven by service improvement initiatives, changes to legislation, regulation, evolving good practice or feedback from customers and other key stakeholders. We will review this policy every three years.

Key legal and regulatory references

- Defective Premises Act 1972
- Environmental Protection Act 1990
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 (Section 11)
- Housing Act 2004
- Decent Homes Standard 2006
- Equality Act 2010
- Home Standard, Regulator of Social Housing, 2015

- Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
- Pre-Action Protocol for Housing Conditions Claims (England), 2021

Related policies

- Compensation Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Disrepair Policy