

DAMP, MOULD AND CONDENSATION POLICY

HARINGEY COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK

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1. Introduction

This document sets out how Haringey will address issues of damp, mould and condensation within the Council's housing stock. It reflects current best practice and is aligned to key national policy and local Council strategic objectives. At the heart of it is a commitment to improving the services we provide to our tenants and leaseholders and increasing their satisfaction with the homes they live in. This comes at a time when there is an even greater imperative for us, both as a Council and as a social housing landlord, to pro-actively work with residents in co-designing the policies that impact their living conditions and well-being. Above all, we are committed to listening to what our tenants and leaseholders have to say about their lived experiences and in doing so, ensure they are treated with empathy and respect.

The policy has been developed in consultation with Haringey's resident Customer Core Group. We will also be seeking their advice on getting resident feedback on the effectiveness of this policy and any learning from this will be used to amend and update the policy.

2. Background

2.1 Strategic Context

In October 2021, the Housing Ombudsman published its' [Spotlight on Damp and Mould](#) report. This report heavily criticised the way a number of social housing landlords have failed to listen to and effectively act upon reports from their tenants and leaseholders about incidents of damp and mould in their homes. The Ombudsman's report makes it clear that social housing providers must adopt a zero-tolerance approach to tackling damp and mould and not to dismiss reports of dampness from their residents as down to 'lifestyle.' This includes taking a more proactive approach when dealing with tenants' complaints about damp.

This reflects the wider principles set out in the Social Housing Regulation Bill which seeks to ensure all social housing residents are given a greater voice in how their homes are managed and that their complaints are listened to and dealt with effectively.

In November 2022, following the inquest into the death of Awaab Ishak, the coroner's report was published, which found that he died from a respiratory condition caused by long term exposure to mould in his social housing Rochdale home. Following this, social landlords were requested to self-assess against the 26 recommendations made in the 'Spotlight' report, which includes having a dedicated damp and mould policy in place.

We have reviewed all our processes and procedures relating to damp and mould to ensure they address all the concerns raised by the coroner and also how our service measures against the 26 recommendations from the Ombudsman's report. This policy sets out both our response to government, and our guarantee to our residents.

The policy covers our responsibilities to tenants and leaseholders living in council homes and to residents living in temporary accommodation within our own stock and leased accommodation. The Council's responsibilities to private sector residents in Haringey is outside the scope of this policy.

2.2 Haringey Context

We know that residents living in homes with damp and mould are more likely to suffer from respiratory problems, allergies, asthma, and other conditions that impact their immune system. We also know that living with damp and mould impacts on the mental health, education and career prospects of our residents. These issues are likely to be exacerbated as a result of the cost-of-living crisis and the impact of fuel poverty leading to an increasing number of residents not being able to heat or ventilate their homes adequately.

The Council is embarking on an ambitious plan for retrofitting its housing stock which will help mitigate some of the issues highlighted, by reducing heating demand and improving health benefits. Works will include insulation and replacement heating systems. The target is to bring all council housing stock from an average Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of a low Band C to Band B by 2035. This includes having a complementary ventilation strategy in place, to avoid the unintended consequences of retrofitting which, because of the increase in air tightness, can lead to an increase in damp and mould.

Addressing issues of damp and mould, as well as reducing the number of associated resident complaints and disrepair claims, also links to other key Haringey Repairs Service (HRS) policies, including those relating to complaints, leaks, voids and post inspection.

The Damp and Mould policy also forms a subset of our overarching policy for hazard management of Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) Category 1 and 2 failures. We are currently developing a case management system to support residents in reporting their active hazards and cases through to resolution.

3. Causes of Damp and Condensation

There are a number of causes of damp and mould which can generally be grouped as follows:

a) Structural Defects

This can be as a result of a design defects when the property was constructed or refurbished. This can include:

- Insufficient damp proof course.
- A defective or non-existent damp proof course, or one which has been bridged, results in rising damp, which is the movement of moisture from the ground rising up through the structure of the building.
- Cold bridging – this is an area in a building where a gap occurs in the insulation (for example: the roof/wall junction and the wall/floor junction). As these areas will be colder than the main areas there is a greater risk of condensation and damp forming.

b) Penetrating Damp

Water penetrating the external structure of the building or internal leaks causing damp, rot and damage to internal surfaces and structure. The cause can be the result of, e.g.:

- Water ingress due to defective or poor original design/workmanship of the structure.
- Defective components, e.g., roof coverings, external wall including defective brickwork, pointing or rendering, doors and windows.
- Defective or blocked rainwater gutters and pipes.
- Defective or leaking internal waste pipes, hot and cold water and heating systems.

- Flooding due to burst pipes.

c) Condensation Damp

Condensation occurs when moisture held in warm air comes into contact with a cold surface and then condenses producing water droplets. This can take two main forms:

- Surface condensation arising when the inner surface of the structure is cooler than the room air.
- Condensation inside the structure where vapour pressure forces water vapour through porous materials (e.g., walls), which then condenses when it reaches colder conditions within the structure.

Conditions that can lead to condensation are:

- Poor ventilation – not opening windows, blocking up vents, not turning on extractor fans in kitchens and bathrooms, not allowing air to circulate around furniture.
- Poor heating – not heating the house which can be a result of fuel poverty.
- Defective or inadequate thermal insulation –missing or defective wall and loft insulation.
- High humidity - not covering pans when cooking and not using an extractor fan and drying laundry inside the house without ventilating can contribute to this.
- Overcrowding.

If the above are left untreated, then mould will develop.

4. Landlord and Tenant Responsibilities

As the landlord, we will ensure that we carry out damp and mould services in accordance with best practice and statutory requirements as follows:

Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018. The Act amends the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 and sets out the rights of tenants including "freedom from damp" and the responsibilities for landlords who are accountable for making sure their properties are fit to live in for tenants, which includes addressing inadequate ventilation, damp and mould issues. This is also covered by the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, Section 11 – Repairs and Maintenance.

Defective Premises Act (DPA) 1972. Under section 4(1) of the DPA, a duty of care is imposed on landlords to ensure that users of their property are reasonably safe from damage or personal injury attributable to a relevant defect. A tenant may be able to claim compensation if their home has been damaged or they have suffered adverse health effects due to the condition of the premises e.g., damp and mould.

The Housing Health and Safety rating system (HHSRS) for rented homes was introduced under the Housing Act 2004 as a risk based evaluation tool to help local authorities identify and protect against potential risks and hazards to health and safety from any deficiencies identified in residential dwellings. This assessment method focuses on the hazards that are present in housing and means a higher burden can be placed upon landlords generally to minimise or avoid potential hazards and to review conditions regularly including to rectify damp and mould in properties. The HHSRS guidance requires a landlord to assess 29 potential housing hazards. Each hazard has a weighting which will determine whether the property is rated as having category 1 (serious) or category 2 (other).

Decent Homes Standard (2006). One of the four aspects of the standard includes the requirement that dwellings must be free from category 1 HHSRS hazards, which includes damp and mould and excessive cold.

The Environmental Protection Act (1990) considers condensation damp or mould growth as examples of defects that are prejudicial to health and we are therefore adopting the same rigorous approach as to eradicating other causes of damp and mould.

Emerging regulation

- The government is currently reviewing the Decent Homes Standard and has also announced a review of the HHSRS in light of the outcomes following the inquest into the death of Awaab Ishak and the coroner's report.
- In February 2023, the government tabled amendments to the Social Housing Regulation Bill to introduce 'Awaab's Law', which will require social housing landlords to fix reported health hazards, including damp and mould, within specified time frames. It will also give additional powers to the Ombudsman to instruct landlords to measure their service against guidance on issues such as damp and mould.
- In February 2023, the Regulator for Social Housing announced that they will introduce more active consumer regulation from April 2024, including inspections, and the quality of homes, including the presence of damp and mould, will be a key focus.

5. Aims, Objectives and key principles

The overall aim of this policy is to provide a clear and transparent framework for our approach to tackling damp and mould in accordance with our statutory obligations. This includes ensuring that our residents are, and feel, listened to, and responded to effectively when experiencing issues of damp and mould.

The key objectives of the policy are to:

- provide and maintain dry, warm, healthy homes for our tenants and leaseholders.
- ensure that the fabric of our homes is protected from deteriorating and damage resulting from damp and condensation.
- ensure that tenants are never blamed, and never feel blamed, and are always treated with dignity and respect.
- ensure every visit count so all staff visiting a tenant's home are able to identify the early signs of damp and mould.
- Implement a zero-tolerance approach to damp and mould.
- Plan resources to respond to periods of higher demand i.e., during the winter months
- Ensure there is a clear and auditable process for recording instances of damp and mould.
- Focus on working in partnership with tenants and leaseholders ensuring that a safe and healthy internal environment is provided.

The policy identifies and addresses three key stages to tackle damp and mould:

1. Proactively preventing damp and mould from occurring
2. Rapidly identifying cases of damp and mould

3. Treating known damp and mould cases and preventing them from reoccurring

6. Prevention

The most significant ways we can reduce incidents of damp, mould and condensation is to minimise the risk of them developing in the first place.

We will take a number of approaches to ensure the best chance of preventing damp and mould, both through work to the fabric of our buildings and through work to support our tenants and provide them with resources to prevent damp and mould from developing.

6.1 Preventative works and repairs

The following preventative measures are likely to have a significant effect on reducing damp and mould from occurring. These measures already form part of our commitments to ensuring our homes meet the decent homes standard and our approach to repairs.

- External fabric being kept in good repair to avoid rain penetration
- Correctly installed and maintained rainwater goods and drainage
- Damp proof courses, membranes and detailing around doors and window openings
- Frost protection for pipes and tanks
- Air vents kept free from blockages
- Timely and appropriate response to tackling leaks
- Effective insulation and efficient heating systems

In addition to the above, we will also ensure that all homes have appropriate ventilation, which includes roof and under floor spaces. Measures include trickle vents in windows, extractor fans/humidistats in kitchens and bathrooms, and dehumidifiers. We will also explore the use of other ventilation options, including Positive Input Ventilation Systems (PIVs) and Mechanical Ventilation Heat Recovery Systems (MVHRS), where appropriate, as part of a whole house retrofit assessment.

We will also improve the energy efficiency of homes and tackle fuel poverty through a range of initiatives set out in the Housing Energy Action Plan (2023), starting with those who are most vulnerable and in need. These include replacing inefficient heating, insulation and whole property 'retrofit works' which address all areas which affect the warmth of homes. Residents living in homes with Energy Performance Ratings of Band C or below, will be prioritised, as these homes are more likely to be susceptible to damp and mould; which is exacerbated by the impact of fuel poverty.

We will prioritise a good responsive repairs service and ensure that responsive repairs to alleviate damp are carried out as quickly and efficiently as possible. We will reduce the number of visits by operatives and contractors and increase the number/percentage of damp related jobs completed in one visit ('Right First Time'). And we will increase our monitoring of the works undertaken by Haringey Repairs Service (HRS) and repairs contractors to make sure the service is performing well.

6.2 Advice and support to residents

We will work in partnership with residents to ensure they have access to appropriate advice and guidance on tackling damp and in particular condensation which they have more

control over. This includes seeking feedback to gauge their views as to the effectiveness of the information and wider support we provide.

We will ensure that tenants and leaseholders have access to and are provided with comprehensive advice and guidance on managing and controlling damp and condensation and are signposted to support with fuel poverty. We will use every opportunity to promote advice on tackling damp, mould and condensation which is available on the Council's website and in leaflets included in the information packs for new tenancies. We will proactively promote advice more widely through social media prior to the commencement of winter; via the resident Customer Core Group, resident associations and resident events, within the rent statements sent to tenants and features via the full range of communications channels with our tenants.

We recognise that not all residents will be able to act upon all of the advice made available to them, for instance around the placement of furniture, or arrangements for drying washing. We will never seek to shift responsibility for tackling damp and mould onto our tenants. We also recognise that not all residents will be equally able to access or respond to this information or advice. This is why it is critical that all staff visiting council homes are able to pick up signs of damp and mould and assist residents in reporting cases and accessing advice.

Haringey already has an 'every visit counts' approach to engaging with residents in their homes, across all council services, in relation to safeguarding. This will be extended to include damp and mould. Appropriate training will be provided to support this.

Where residents are not happy with the response they receive in cases related to damp and mould they can raise this through the Council's recently updated Complaints Process, which is aligned to the Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code. We are also proactively promoting the Complaints Policy and Process which are published on the Council's website alongside information on the right to refer a case to the Housing Ombudsman.

7. Identification

Making sure that we quickly identify homes that are suffering from damp and mould or are at risk of this means that we can act quickly to remove the damp and mould; address its root causes and prevent it from reoccurring. We identify homes in three main ways: firstly, by analysing data on our housing stock; secondly, by equipping all officers to identify damp and mould and ensuring there are clear channels to report this; and thirdly by supporting residents to identify damp and mould, providing them with clear channels to report this, and ensuring that they are confident that the problem will be dealt with swiftly.

7.1 Data Management, Systems and use of Technologies

Knowing our stock and the type of properties and components that are likely to suffer from damp and mould will ensure that we can proactively identify cases. We have a wide range of data sets which we use to analyse the extent of damp and mould issues affecting our properties. Since April 2021, a RICS registered practice has been undertaking stock condition surveys of our properties, which at the end of their commission will mean that 100% of our housing stock will have been surveyed. The surveys include identifying any HHSRS hazards, (including damp and mould).

As part of our new overall end to end process for addressing damp and mould, all damp and mould hazards identified by the stock condition survey are referred to HRS, with category 1 marked for urgent action.

The overall stock condition survey data feeds into our Asset Management database which is used for investment planning. This includes identifying and targeting homes that do not meet the Decent Homes Standard. Rectifying issues of damp and mould in homes is captured within the scope of works alongside energy efficiency and building safety.

We are also considering the use of technology and equipment which can be used to help with detection and reduce the impact of damp and mould while we are resolving the root cause of the problem. Technology such as smart thermostats can help with identifying properties at risk of condensation, damp and mould. They can also help to evaluate the effectiveness of other retrofit interventions.

7.2 Staff – Training, equipment and raising awareness

We will ensure that the Council's contact centre and HRS staff are sufficiently trained and have the appropriate skills and equipment to carry out their work effectively. Training has already been undertaken within the repairs team in the past year, but additional training has been arranged to improve the diagnostic of damp and mould issues including HHSRS training for all team leaders and surveyors within the repairs and maintenance services.

In addition, we will provide training to all staff who visit tenants' homes to identify the early signs of damp and mould and respond quickly. Estates Services, Tenancy Management, Adult and Children's services and other teams across the Council are aware of how serious an issue this is for residents and how all staff can contribute to alleviating the problems associated with damp and mould.

We will also provide training to support staff to respond fairly and equitably to tenants and leaseholders, including by helping them to understand how they can and should positively address any barriers residents may experience when raising concerns or seeking support.

7.3 Resident reporting

Residents must be equipped to identify damp and mould, and to have clear channels for reporting this. As part of the advice and support to residents noted in section 6.2, we will make sure that residents are clear as to early signs of damp and mould and are aware of dedicated reporting channels alongside existing channels for reporting repairs. A new dedicated damp and mould phone line and mailbox have been set up as part of the Council's commitment to facilitate the reporting process. Enquiries will be directed to a specialist Damp and Mould team based in the Housing Repairs Services Residents can call 020 8489 5611 where they will have the option to get through directly to the specialist team or can report damp and mould issues by emailing dampandmould@haringey.gov.uk.

8. Treatment

As soon as the Council's repairs team are aware of a damp and mould case, it will be categorised according to severity, with the most serious cases prioritised for immediate action.

All referrals relating to damp and mould will be reviewed and the tenant will be responded to within five working days.

8.1 Category 1 (serious) hazards: -

- In the most severe cases, a works order will be raised and an emergency inspection will be carried out by a surveyor within one working day.
- We will aim to remove the immediate risk, where appropriate, through a damp and mould wash. This will ensure that the home does not pose a threat to the health of the household. Where the risk cannot be removed immediately because of the extent of the works required we will move residents out of their home immediately under our temporary moves policy if the location of the mould in their home poses a risk to their health. Household members' vulnerabilities will also be considered, for example if the household contains children or people with conditions making them particularly susceptible to illness following exposure to any mould.
- In all other cases, a works order will be raised and an operative/surveyor will attend within five working days.
- Complete the works to property within 3 months (unless there is an exceptional reason why this cannot be achieved).
- An operative/surveyor will complete an inspection 3 months after works have been completed to ensure there are no further issues.

8.2 Category 2 (moderate) hazards: -

- All referrals relating to damp and mould will be reviewed and the tenant responded to within five working days.
- A works order will be raised, and an operative/surveyor will attend within five working days.
- The surveyor that has visited the property will agree an action plan with the resident including agreeing a schedule of works.
- Where it is appropriate, mould washes will be undertaken and dehumidifiers will be provided and advice given to the resident on how to reduce issues with damp and mould, while the cause of the damp is identified and rectified
- Repairs will be undertaken within the target time scale as set out in our published repairs standards.
- We will keep these cases under review and we will ask residents or their advocates to let us know if the damp and mould returns or gets worse.
- In the meantime, advice will be provided on how to reduce damp and mould.
- In circumstances where a serious Cat 2 hazard is identified and this is causing adverse effects to residents who are vulnerable for age and health related conditions, the Operational Director, Housing Service and Building Safety may decide or delegate this decision for a temporary decant to be offered.

8.3 Category 2 (slight/typical) hazards

Where a hazard has been classified as a slight or typical risk, this will be actioned as a normal responsive repair and attended to within 28 days.

8.4 Disrepair cases.

The above process applies to all identified cases of damp and mould, regardless of whether the case is the subject of a disrepair claim.

9. Policy Implementation

In order to implement the objectives of the policy, we have also developed a new detailed procedure which ensures staff have clear guidelines for tackling issues of damp and mould. This is supported by a clear and auditable process for tracking instances of damp and mould through all stages from initial diagnosis, the steps we will take to address the issue, with timescales, aftercare and what communication and action residents can expect from us.

10 Performance Monitoring/Quality Assurance

A cross cutting project group has been established to coordinate the Council's work around damp and mould, which has developed a robust action plan to ensure we identify cases in Council homes and deal with them quickly and effectively. This includes officers from Children's and Adults services as well as Housing and Property. The action plan tracks our progress in responding to the 26 recommendations from the Ombudsman.

Regular reports will also be provided on repeat repairs from damp and leaks to the Asset Management team so that, where practical, the most severe cases can be linked into the major works programmes.

Implementation of the damp and mould policy, and the associated action plan, will be monitored by the new Housing Improvement Board which is chaired by the Chief Executive.

To ensure the effectiveness of the policy, we will monitor performance against the following measures.

- Number of damp and mould cases reported / identified
- Number of damp and mould cases visited and assessed
- Number of damp and mould cases with all identified remedial works completed.

The aim is to see an overall:

- Reduction in the number of ad hoc repairs relating to damp and mould
- Reduction in the number of recall visits relating to damp and mould
- Reduction in number of complaints relating to damp and mould
- Reduction in number of disrepair claims relating to damp and mould
- Increase in resident satisfaction with response to treating damp and mould

We are also committed to understanding any inequalities in access to, experience and outcomes of, services and support relating to damp and mould and will put in place processes that support the identification of these, particularly for those groups most affected by damp and mould.

9. Value for Money

One of the key aims of this policy is to ensure that we use our repairs and maintenance budgets effectively. Treating damp and mould once it has taken hold of a property can be extremely costly. By enhancing preventative works, identifying and monitoring potential causes of damp, linking the most severe cases into planned investment programmes;

thereby reducing reactive repairs and cases of disrepair, should reduce the overall cost to the service. Looking at the bigger picture, the cost to other public services such as the health service will also reduce by improving living conditions.

10. Equalities

The Council has a Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share those protected characteristics¹ and people who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not.

Residents from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, older people, disabled people, women and low-income households are disproportionately represented among current Council tenants, and so are more likely to be affected by damp and mould. In addition, many of these groups are also potentially more likely to be affected by issues which can cause or exacerbate damp and mould, including fuel poverty and overcrowding. As such, the implementation of this policy presents a significant opportunity to address potential inequalities affecting these groups and to advance equality of opportunity by improving outcomes and in particular, to address the health inequalities which arise from poor housing.

However, in order to achieve this, implementation of the policy needs to ensure that residents are treated fairly and equitably, and that any barriers faced by residents when communicating with, and receiving support from, the Council are removed. This recognises that the coroner's report following Awaab Ishak's death identified lack of communication, especially given that English was not his families' first language, was one of the key failings on the part of the landlord.

In the implementation of this policy, the Council will therefore take all necessary steps to ensuring equality of access, experience and outcome for residents seeking or receiving support with damp and mould. This will include:

- Training and development with frontline staff to ensure that all tenants and leaseholders are treated with dignity and respect, and that any barriers which may impact our ability to support them are removed
- proactive translation of communication materials about damp and mould
- appropriate use of translation and interpretation support for residents who are speakers of another language (EAL) or speakers of British Sign Language (BSL)

In addition, the Council recognises the potential to prevent or reduce the incidence of damp and mould by using available levers to address some of the causes of it, particularly through effective signposting to fuel poverty support.

¹ The three parts of the duty apply to the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/faith, sex and sexual orientation. Marriage and civil partnership status apply to the first part of the duty.

11. Review

In order to monitor the success of the policy it will next be reviewed in March 2024 or sooner, if required by statutory, regulatory or best practice developments. The resident Customer Core Group will be consulted about any update of the policy.