

# Damp and Mould

Housing Services

January 2023



# Introduction

Damp and condensation is still a problem for too many of our residents. By combining strategic work around home condition surveys and evidence-based preventative maintenance strategies, enhanced support for residents, and rapid response to reported mould issues, the Council is better placed than it has ever been to make damp and mould cases the exception.

Tackling damp and mould is a top priority for Housing Services and will remain so.



# Our Damp and Mould Strategy

Housing Services has implemented a suite of strategic, preventative, and reactive measures and initiatives to tackle damp and mould in homes. These measures are summarised below and described in detail within the body of the presentation:

## Tackling current instances

### Recognition

**Rapid Response and Specialist Training** — a rapid response mould removal and treatment team within Community Works. All operatives have been trained on the removal and treatment of mould. Surveyors have also had specialist training.

**Residents' Repairs Handbook** — updated in 2022 to change some of the language (more empathetic) to reflect the current work being done around damp and mould – and to better support vulnerable residents.

**Commitment to Residents (Damp Charter)** — a Damp Charter which sets out a series of no-blame commitments to residents and fundamentally challenges and changes culture - ensuring damp and mould is remedied in partnership.

## Protecting my home

**Reliable Home Condition Data** — 14,000 individual homes have been physically surveyed so far (HHSRS hazards, Decent Homes 2, Energy Efficiency) to inform reactive, planned and capital investment maintenance programmes.

**Project Group and Action Planning** — a Disrepair Project Group was formed in November 2021 which developed a 16-point action plan to drive down and better manage instances of disrepair, damp and mould. The Group meets weekly.

**Home Fitness Management** — appointed a dedicated Housing Fitness Manager who coordinates all of the HHSRS Hazards into work programmes.

**Home MOTs** — physical surveys of residents' homes with a focus on vulnerable residents and where we are seeing a disproportionately high volume of repair request.

**Periodic Home Health Checks** — after any damp and/or mould treatment work works, the council will undertake an annual survey of those homes to check that the remedial work/treatment continues to be effective.

**Planned Maintenance**

**Estate Action Days**

## Long term strategies

**Healthy Homes Partnership** — creating an over-arching commitment from all repair teams and contractors to collectively improve the health of residents' homes — together with a commonly-held manifesto. A Head of Healthy Homes appointed.

**New Technology** — this includes the installation of smart home meters in all new lettings that will provide a platform to identify condensation, damp and mould risk.

**Arbitration Scheme** — the council has sponsored a new, independent Disrepair Arbitration Scheme – the first of its kind in the country. The new service will follow a residents-first approach to resolving disrepair claims.

**Focused and joined-up Data Analysis**

**Task and Finish Group**

**Compliance-level Assurance** — armed with the biggest home condition survey to date and HHSRS assessments (which assesses the most vulnerable category of resident), damp and mould will now receive a compliance level of assurance.



Damp and Mould Strategy

# Tackling Current Instances

# Recognition

Damp and mould is still a problem for too many of our residents – something the council recognises and is determined to correct. Tackling damp and mould was an integral part of designing the new repairs service and commenced with a clear decision to survey all of our homes and formally assess the presence of damp and mould risks in each home surveyed. Specialist training, the formation of a project group and reinforcing a no-blame culture in our documentation and interactions with residents was also put in place early on.

# Rapid Response and Specialist Training

We have put in place a rapid response mould removal and treatment team within our flagship in-house repairs team – Community Works. All operatives have now been trained on the removal and treatment of mould. Surveyors have also undertaken specialist training on the diagnosis and prevention of damp and mould.

# Residents' Repairs Handbook

The council's Repairs Handbook was updated in 2022 to change some of the language to reflect the current work being done around damp and mould – and to better support vulnerable residents, and create a more empathetic and accountable culture. It will be updated again following the resident Damp and Mould Task and Finish Group project.

# No-Blame Commitment to Residents (Damp Charter)

We have launched a Damp Charter which sets out a series of no-blame commitments to residents (the first Charter commitment to residents is: "It's not your fault. The council is committed to resolving issues in partnership with you and will communicate with you in a sympathetic way. The council has created a Healthy Homes Partnership to make sure this happens."). The Charter fundamentally challenges and changes culture to ensure damp and mould issues are remedied in partnership with residents and without blame.



## DAMP CHARTER

Everyone should live in a warm and dry home.



Damp and condensation are still a problem for too many of our tenants. There are lots of factors that can cause damp and condensation, which can be challenging to manage. We are determined to overcome these challenges and make the following commitments:

- 1 It's not your fault.** The council is committed to resolving issues in partnership with you and will communicate with you in a sympathetic way. The council has created a Healthy Homes Partnership to make sure this happens.
- 2 Quick diagnosis.** We will arrange an inspection to diagnose the issue within 28 days, or sooner in emergency situations.
- 3 Remedy.** We will agree and write an action plan with you to resolve the damp, that will include timeframes.
- 4 Ongoing support.** If your home has persistent damp, you will be allocated a surveyor who will act as your Healthy Homes Partner and be your point of contact. They will arrange the necessary work and stay in touch until it is completed. They will also give you tips on how to minimise condensation and advise where help may be available to support you with your energy bills.
- 5 Prevention.** We are surveying 19,000 of our homes over the next three years to help identify which ones are prone to damp (most of our homes are over 50 years old). This will inform more regular and targeted maintenance of residents' homes, and better communication on proposed work.
- 6 Technology.** We are investing in technology to help resolve damp issues which your Healthy Homes Partner will discuss with you.
- 7 Resources.** The council is committed to prioritising resources to tackle damp issues with dedicated neighbourhood teams.
- 8 Delivering the Charter?**  commitments will be reviewed every year.







Damp and Mould Strategy

# Protecting my home

# Reliable Home Condition Data

The first part of our strategy to make sure our homes are of a good standard and meet the fitness standard for housing was to physically survey all of our residents' homes – ensuring hazards are identified, and Decent Homes 2 criteria is met.

This physical survey includes (1) the condition of the resident's home and the age of its components under the Decent Homes 2 criteria; (2) the identification of any hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS); (3) an energy efficiency survey using industry standard assessment criteria; (4) any other urgent issues.

16,000 individual homes have been physically surveyed so far and all of this information is being recorded on the council's housing management database and being used to inform reactive, planned and capital investment maintenance programmes.

# Project Group and Action Planning

In response to the council's prioritisation of disrepair and the Housing Ombudsman's Spotlight Report on Damp and Mould, a Disrepair Project Group was formed in November 2021 which developed a 16-point action plan that will drive down and better manage instances of disrepair, damp and mould. This Group meets weekly to drive the actions and develop new initiatives.

# Home Fitness Management

We have appointed a dedicated Housing Fitness Manager who coordinates – with the support of two experienced building surveyors – all of the HHSRS Hazards (damp and mould growth being the foremost hazard) into work programmes. Urgent Category 1 work is undertaken by the council's existing responsive repair contractors and in-house repairs team – Community Works; less urgent Category 2 hazards are packaged into work programmes and delivered by smaller dedicated contractors.

# Home MOTs

Home MOTs have commenced. This again involves a physical survey of residents' homes with a focus on vulnerable residents and where we are seeing a disproportionately high volume of repair requests.

# Periodic Home Health Checks

After any damp and/or mould treatment work works, the council will undertake an annual survey of those homes to check that the remedial work/treatment continues to be effective.

# Planned Maintenance

The council is moving to a more proactive and long term approach to the maintenance of its housing stock – reducing reliance on its responsive repairs service. This will ensure complex damp and mould cases are better managed and prevented. To do this the council needed a better understanding of the condition of its homes – informed through the individual home condition surveys. When completed in early 2023, this will be the council's biggest stock condition survey programme to date. This will inform a well-considered and evidence-based long term programme of cyclical, planned and major work schemes to keep homes in good condition and reduce instances of damp and mould.

# Estate Action Days

A series of Estate Action Days are being planned for 2023 that will have a focus on damp and mould – with operatives at the events to remove and treat mould, and undertake repairs that may be contributing to the damp and mould. Surveyors will also be at the events to answer queries, diagnose damp and arrange more fundamental preventative work.





Damp and Mould Strategy

# Long-term Strategies

# Focused and Joined-up Data Analysis

All the home condition survey data (condition and energy) will be overlaid with our responsive repair data to ensure our planned and capital investments programmes optimise budget allocations and proactively design out HHSRS hazards and instances of damp and mould.

The detailed home condition survey has identified 600 damp and mould hazards – just under 5% of the homes surveyed. 313 specific damp and mould repairs/projects have been completed so far. Upon completion of the survey in 3 months we will know precisely the number of homes with a damp or mould related issue. We do not however anticipate the proportion will increase as the home condition survey prioritised those homes reporting the most repairs.

# Task and Finish Group

A Damp and Mould Task and Finish Group will be formed in 2023. The Group will primarily involve residents with a live damp and/or mould issue who will work with trained surveyors to trial, research and monitor a series of solutions. The outcomes of these case studies and research will inform a suite of new actions to further improve the council's approach to tackling damp and mould in a resident-focused way.

# Healthy Homes Partnership

The council has launched a Healthy Homes Partnership that will create an over-arching commitment from all of the council's repair teams and contractors to work together to improve the health of residents' homes – together with a commonly-held manifesto.

This will involve a range of initiatives but tackling damp and mould prevention will be a central commitment. A dedicated Healthy Homes Manager is in place to drive these commitments; and to give assurance and oversight over HHSRS risks, legal disrepair and the Damp Charter.

# Technology

As part of the council's overall strategy to tackle damp and mould growth, and its commitments under its Damp Charter, it is reviewing and implementing new technology to help reduce instances of damp and mould. This includes the installation of smart home meters in all new lettings that will provide a platform to identify condensation, damp and mould risk; and flags potential fuel poverty. It also helps residents to optimise their energy use. We are also installing whole-home ventilation systems to homes where their physical characteristics make it difficult for the council and residents to prevent condensation forming.

# Arbitration Scheme

In response to the Housing Ombudsman's Spotlight Report and a national trend of rising disrepair claims, the council has sponsored a new, independent Disrepair Arbitration Scheme – the first of its kind in the country. The new service will follow a residents-first approach to resolving disrepair claims.

Disrepair claims involving damp and mould will be resolved in a quicker and fairer way – and residents will get to keep one hundred per cent of their compensation award through the new Disrepair Arbitration Scheme. Legal firms often require residents to enter into conditional fee arrangements that can result in them not receiving all of their compensation award. The new scheme provides residents with a free, independent, and straightforward way to resolve disrepair claims – ensuring residents get the compensation they deserve.

The Scheme is part of the radical transformation of the repairs service, which is now focused on providing healthy homes for residents and proactively addressing any past issues.



# Compliance-level Assurance

Armed with the biggest home condition survey to date and HHSRS assessments (which assesses the most vulnerable category of resident), damp and mould will now receive a compliance level of assurance.

# Thank you for listening

As you can see, the Council is better placed than it has ever been to make damp and mould cases the exception. But we will continue to develop and progress new solutions to make residents' homes as healthy as possible going forward.