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# Damp and Mould Policy

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September 2017

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Tenant Services

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**Reviewed by:** *Colin Scott*

**Approved by:** *Housing Committee*

## **PART 1      POLICY BACKGROUND & COVERAGE**

### **Introduction**

- 1.1      Studies estimate that in the UK between 10-50% of homes are affected by damp. Social housing and low income communities where there is often overcrowding, lack of appropriate heating, ventilation and insulation can experience a substantially higher proportion of damp and mould than the national average.

In addition, high energy costs prevent the adequate heating of many homes during winter (fuel poverty) leading to increased condensation and indoor dampness<sup>1</sup>.

Stroud District Council tenants could fall into either or both of the above criteria which increase the likelihood of living in a home which suffers from damp and mould.

- 1.1      Sufficient evidence has been found to link exposure to indoor mould with upper respiratory tract symptoms, coughing, and wheezing in otherwise healthy people

Numbers of dust mites are elevated by damp indoor environments; dust mites affect allergies and asthma.

Studies have shown that dampness and mould are associated with approximately 30-50% increases in respiratory and asthma related health outcomes.

People living in homes with damp and mould may also experience depression and anxiety due to the conditions.

- 1.2      Damp and Mould related health outcomes may affect people regardless of age or current health; the elderly and children are most at risk.

Poor housing conditions result in frequent absence from school for children due to ill-health, in educational under-achievement and less earning power. Based on GCSE results alone it is calculated that the cost to children living in poor housing conditions amounts to a total of £14.8 billion in lost potential earnings.

## **Key Principles of the Damp and Mould Policy**

2.1 The key principles of the Damp and Mould policy are:

- To ensure we provide and maintain dry, warm, healthy homes for our tenants.
- To ensure that the fabric of our property is protected from deterioration and damage resulting from damp and mould.

We will achieve these aims by:

- Informing tenants to make lifestyle changes which reduce condensation
- Informing both tenants and staff about the health risks of living in damp and/or mouldy homes
- Publicising damp remediation work that we can do

1 Training staff and operatives to:

- spot signs of condensation, damp and mould and understand the causes and remedies of these
- carry out maintenance to reduce the occurrence of damp and mould
- Knowing our stock and the archetypes of properties that are likely to suffer from damp and mould. Understanding the components in our properties which may cause damp
- Investing in both preventative and reactive measures
- Planning resources i.e. to respond to higher demand in winter
- Making sure that appropriate budget levels are assigned to reducing the cause of damp and mould
- Providing our officers with the correct equipment to assess damp in properties and find resolution to the problem if it is our responsibility
- Complying with all statutory and regulatory requirements and with best practice relating to the provision of this service
- Treating tenants in a fair and non-discriminatory way, in accordance with our Equalities Act 2010.

2 Liaising with other Social Housing Landlords, Environmental Health and other Energy Advice agencies.

## Relevant legislation and regulatory compliance

3.1 We will ensure that we carry out damp and mould services in accordance with best practice and relevant policy and legislation, including the following:

- **Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, Section 11 – Repairs and Maintenance**

We are responsible for:

- maintaining the structure and exterior of the property, keeping it in good repair including drains gutters and external pipes
- keeping installations for the supply of water, gas, electricity and sanitation in good repair and proper working order
- keeping installations for space heating and water heating in good repair and proper working order

- **Housing Act 2004 – Housing Health and Safety Rating System**

Damp and Mould Growth - Includes threats to physical and mental health from:

- House dust mites
- Mould or fungal growth

Both are caused by dampness and/or high humidity.

Causes of dust mite and mould and fungal growth are related directly to dampness which is caused by:

- Reduced ventilation levels;
- Increased humidity, especially beyond 70% ; and
- Warmer indoor temperatures in winter because of dwelling design in renovated houses.

Potential preventive measures that could have a significant effect on likelihood and harm outcomes relating to moisture production and ventilation:

- Damp proof courses, membranes and detailing around doors and window openings
- External fabric kept in good repair to avoid rain penetration
- Frost protection for pipes and tanks
- Properly installed baths, sinks etc., with
- Properly installed drainage
- Properly installed and maintained rainwater goods
- Properly ventilated roof and under floor spaces to ensure timber remains air dry

- Adequate extraction of moisture laden air during peak times, like cooking and bathing and laundry
- Heating type
- Continuous low-level background ventilation where necessary
- Sufficient means of ventilation to cope with moisture from normal domestic activities without the need to open windows that could lead to heat loss, noise and security risks; and
- Appropriate ventilation for dwellings of high occupant density.

### **Best Practice**

- 4.1 We will regularly seek best practice from organisations who deliver damp and mould services and adopt any good practices which will help us to tackle this issue.

## **PART 2      Damp and Mould Trends and Locations**

1.1      At Stroud District Council Officers have reported that the most common causes of damp and mould in our properties are:

- **Cold Bridging-** this can be in many areas including insulation not fully going in the eaves of a roof, raking eaves, concrete mullions and lintels, poorly installed cavity wall insulation and many other examples.
- **Blocked vents-** on many occasions ventilation provided either mechanical or background ventilation being blocked off, broken or covered.
- **Finlock gutters-** this type of guttering is notoriously defective and leaks leading to penetrating damp and cold bridging for condensation.
- **Type and location of radiators-** heating systems are not always to the performance standard required to prevent condensation and far too often radiators are located on the internal walls creating colder external walls and may be undersized for the room volume.
- **No extractor fans in kitchens, bathrooms and utility rooms**
- **Unvented and condensing tumble dryers-** these produce a serious amount of water vapour in the space encouraging condensation.
- **Bridging Damp-** there are many cases of bridging damp from render systems going below the DPC to ground level, concrete paving and ground levels being increased, entrance canopy roofs and wall tie snots not cleared.
- **Leaking of insufficient guttering-** there are many cases where guttering is overflowing, leaking joints, lack of maintenance for clearing gutters and in some cases particularly outbuildings where there is no guttering.
- **Lack of pointing on brickwork-** for various reasons there is poor or broken away pointing on parts of brick walls; this may have created cold spots for condensation and opportunity for penetrating damp.
- **Penetrating Damp from render systems-** this could be because they have exceeded their life span and also because the mix is too dense.
- **Tenant and resident lifestyle** – the way some tenants and residents conduct their everyday living can cause excessive humidity within a property, creating conditions where mould can thrive. Lack of adequate ventilation is the primary cause, but drying clothes on radiators, cooking with lids off pans and even tropical fish tanks all add to the moisture levels within a property.
- **Fuel Poverty** – it is now recognised that fuel poverty is becoming a major factor in the increase that has been seen in damp and mould problems. Tenants and residents are unable to afford to heat their homes effectively or evenly which then creates the conditions for moulds to thrive.

## **PART 3 AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY**

### **Tenant's responsibilities**

- 2.1 Mould can be caused by condensation and may adversely affect your health and our property. Tenants are responsible for making sure that the way they live their lives does not cause significant amounts of condensation that results in mould growth.

Condensation is caused by:

- 1 Humidity of indoor air
  - 2 Low temperature
    - Poor ventilation
- 1.2 Mould caused by condensation is usually black and typically grows in bathrooms, kitchens and bedrooms.
- 1.3 Support available to help you:
- You can find advice about how to prevent or reduce condensation in our document “preventing damp in your home” available via the website - Go to the Stroud District Council Website, Tenant Services area ([www.stroud.gov.uk](http://www.stroud.gov.uk))
  - Contact our Repairs Advisors on 01453 754852

### **The Councils responsibilities**

- 2.1 We are responsible for insulating your home in accordance with Decent Homes Standard to help reduce the likelihood of condensation occurring.
- 2.2 We are responsible for maintaining your home to avoid penetrating and rising damp or for carrying out remedial action if these do occur.

Penetrating and rising damp is typically misdiagnosed, but can sometimes be caused by:

- Lateral Rain Penetration
- Condensation or entrapped moisture
- High Ground levels
- Bridging of damp proof course
- Defective rainwater goods
- Salt contamination (Hygroscopic salts can absorb moisture from the air and cause staining – REF: Watts Pocket Handbook 2004)
- Water leaks from windows, roof, overflow pipes, gutters or drainpipes, internal plumbing
- Defective or non-existent damp proof course
- Inadequate cleaning and drying after major leaks and bursts or floods

2.3 Penetrating or rising damp usually leaves a tide mark

## **PART 4 TRAINING**

- 1.2 We will ensure that all of our staff and contractors have training to raise awareness and create a good understanding of this policy.
- 1.3 We will ensure that all of our staff, other relevant Council staff (visiting Officers) and contractors have training to raise awareness of and create a good understanding of damp and mould issues, related issues (i.e. health), causes and measures to combat these.

## **PART 5 DAMP AND MOULD**

### **Preventative Work**

- 2.1 To reduce the occurrence of condensation, damp and mould in our homes we will:
- Promote information about how to reduce condensation
  - Identify a list of components most likely to cause damp.
    - Liaise with our contractors to monitor these items and when officers carry out repairs visits and arrange to replace any components where the condition has deteriorated and may result in damp.
    - Highlight any areas of concern at the time of each stock condition survey.
  - Carry out work to fix any problems that are found
  - Tackle fuel poverty through a range of initiatives set out in the Energy Strategy, starting with those who are most vulnerable and in need. These include, replacing inefficient heating with traditional or renewable heating, insulation programmes and whole property 'retrofit works' which address all areas which affect the warmth of your home.
  - Investigate the possibility of providing secure drying areas in communal flat blocks to reduce the need to dry washing on radiators or inside flats.
- 1.2 We aim to carry out a stock condition survey for each property every 5 years and would like to work towards a property MOT system within the next 5 years.
- 1.3 Review each damp and mould works order raised after 6 months to see if the proposed solution has been effective.
- 1.4 All Maintenance teams to follow damp and mould policy to prevent damp and mould by tackling issues when involved with works on the property.

### **Reactive Work**

When you contact us in relation to a Damp and Mould issue we will:

- 2.1
- Complete a property and diagnostics questionnaire with you by telephone when you report a problem to ensure we have enough information and can keep records.
  - If the outcome shows that condensation is likely to be causing the problem we will discuss ways in which you can make changes to improve the situation.
  - If the outcome shows that damp is likely to be present in your home, we will
    - Fix the problem if it is our responsibility and to advise the tenants of how to resolve the issue if it is a lifestyle issue and not a problem with the building
    - Carry out a full property service which reviews things like heating, pipes, rainwater goods, damp proof course and loft insulation where the problem is not as easy to identify
    - Do a full property survey, including an inspection of cavity wall insulation, thermal imaging, take damp and humidity measurements and carry out an underground survey via CCTV if appropriate.

We will evaluate the results of the survey to establish the cause of the problem and advise you of the remedial action we will take, steps you should take and any further work that is required in the future, together with a timeframe for this.

- 2.2 Offer a damp and mould leaflet prior to each visit arranged in connection with these issues.

## **PART 6      VALUE FOR MONEY**

- 1.1 Fixing damp and mould once it has taken hold of a property can be extremely costly. By enhancing stock condition surveys to include a full property service as well monitoring any potential causes of damp and mould during day-to-day visits, the cost to the service should reduce.
- 1.2 A full property service may also reduce reactive repairs unrelated to damp and mould issues.
- 1.3 There could be a financial implication to SDC if property services are introduced because we may pick up a greater number of repair items that residents may not be aware of.
- 1.4 The cost to other public services such as the health service will reduce by improving living conditions.