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1. Introduction

Damp and Mould are conditions caused by too much moisture in your home. The Repairs and Maintenance Policy generally cover the repairs needed to the property but do not address how damp and mould specifically, will be managed by the council.

The age and construction type of the Council's property stock are contributing factors alongside poor thermal performance, which can create difficulties for tenants to provide sufficient heating and ventilation, creating ideal conditions for mould

The ability for a tenant to effectively heat and ventilate their home is a key consideration and recent increases in fuel costs are adding to the overall impact and increase in reports of damp and mould.

The aim of this protocol is to detail the Council's response to the management of damp and mould, and to set a framework to proactively manage potential risks and promptly diagnose and prevent issues which may arise from damp and mould in our properties, including communal areas through the following:

Undertake effective investigations and implement reasonable remedial repair solutions and improvements to manage damp, mould and condensation.

Offer advice and assistance to customers living in our properties, including information on how to prevent damp, mould and condensation.

To signpost residents who are experiencing difficulties managing their heating costs to charities and other support agencies for assistance.

Ensure staff and contractors are trained on how to recognise, manage, and identify solutions to damp, mould and condensation

2. Relevant legislation and regulatory compliance

This protocol is written in the context of the current legal and regulatory requirements as set out in the Repairs and Maintenance Policy with particular focus on the Landlord and Tenant Act, 1985, the Housing Health and Safety Rating System within the Housing Act 2004, Home (Fitness for habitation) Act 2018 and Decent Homes Guidance

In order to respond to best practice, the Policy also seeks to have strong reference to the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England by specifically addressing the emerging requirements and expectations set by the Social Housing Regulator and amendments to the Social Housing Bill.

3. Responsibilities

3.1 Tenant Responsibilities

Damp and mould caused by condensation can often be controlled by simple measures which can be adopted by the tenant. These responsibilities include:

- Following all advice and guidance issued by us, on managing and controlling damp, mould and condensation.
- Regularly checking for and reporting any leaks, or faulty heating, windows, or extractor fans.
- Ensuring of the general upkeep and cleaning of extractor fans and vents (i.e., that they are not blocked).
- allowing access for inspections and for the carrying out of all remedial works.
- Not allowing the property to become overcrowded or using the property as a business or for purpose it was not originally intended.

3.2 Landlord Responsibilities

The Council is responsible for the maintenance, repair and replacement of the structure and common parts of its properties, as set out in the Tenancy Agreement and Tenants' Handbook.

The repairing obligations in relation to damp and mould are set out generally in the Housing Act 2004. The Housing Health & Safety System is a mechanism to inspect and assess hazards in property and grade these according to risk.

Damp and Mould are specifically addressed under section 9 of the Housing Act 2004,

4. Identifying Damp and Mould

Damp is a general term used to describe conditions where there is high moisture level in a building.

Rising damp is due to a defective, breached or non-existent damp course. This will leave a 'tide mark' about 1m above the floor. Fixing rising damp is a job for a qualified builder.

Penetrating damp is moisture entering the house through leaking pipes, a damaged roof, blocked gutters, gaps around window frames and cracked rendering and brickwork etc. All these problems can be remedied.

Condensation occurs when moist air meets a colder surface like a wall, window, mirror etc. The air can't hold the moisture and tiny drops of water appear. It also occurs in places the air is still, like the corners of rooms, behind furniture or inside wardrobes.

Mould is a general term used to describe a type of spore-producing hyphomycetes fungi and there are many different types.

Mould is an ever-present part of our ecosystem, and their spores and fragments are always present to a greater or lesser extent in our homes, workplaces and public buildings. It is virtually impossible to completely get rid of them.

As mould spores land on places where there is excessive moisture, such as properties suffering from condensation, rising damp, penetrating dampness or leaks, these spores will grow. Many building materials provide nutrients that encourage growth.

Mould grows on organic materials, for example wood, paint and fabric, all it then needs to thrive is oxygen and moisture. Moisture is likely to be the key element because organic materials and oxygen are also present in homes which do not have problems with mould.

It is important to recognise that not all damp and mould presents the same risk to our tenants. The most immediate risk relates to severe mould growth which may cause airborne toxicity and is therefore especially dangerous to some of our vulnerable tenants.

We will not generally undertake any tests to identify specific mould types but deal with all mould types in the same manner.

5. The Impact of Damp & Mould

Exposure to mould spores can cause a wide range of symptoms including rashes, itchy eyes, sneezing, coughs, dizziness and nausea.

The long-term effects of mould exposure can be more severe for those with a weakened immune system. As the body goes into overdrive trying to fight the foreign pathogens, it is left weakened, exposed and vulnerable to other diseases.

The elderly, children and those with existing allergies are all considered to be more susceptible to mould exposure.

6. Investigation and Repair Process

6.1 Investigative Process

It is essential to correctly identify root causes of damp. Condensation is the main cause of mould, however there may be defects causing or contributing to high humidity levels.

The need to act quickly to identify and manage damp and mould as a hazard may entail several visits to assess the severity of the damp and to carry out follow up surveys.

Visual observations both externally and internally are of vital importance and should be detailed within the report. The inspection should adopt a holistic whole house approach that considers the implications of:

- Location
- Building structure
- Construction materials
- Maintenance / Condition / Defects
- Thermal performance
- Ventilation
- Number of occupants
- Pattern of occupancy
- Heating pattern
- Family economics –heating costs
- Domestic appliances – e.g., condenser dryers
- Arrangements for drying washing and wet clothing
- Existing ventilation – especially bathrooms and kitchens

6.2 Initial Report Actions¹

1. We will log an inspection on the Repairs recording system.

2. We will carry out an Inspection to assess the severity of the mould and to establish whether there are any property issues causing or contributing to the problem. This will be carried out within 14 days of the first report of mould.
3. Information on managing condensation and advice will be given to tenants.
4. We will arrange any initial works which will usually involve a clean of the mould to remove the immediate hazard. The target timescale for these works is within 28 working days.
5. Further surveys will be arranged following recommendations for additional technical surveys, monitoring and or follow up repairs. Timescales for repairs will be allocated in accordance with prioritisation based on the severity of the problem.
6. Signposting to other agencies and referrals for support with energy bills will be provided where appropriate.
7. Where damp and mould is severe and the risk posed to tenants is significant, we will arrange to temporarily decant tenants whilst investigations and works are carried out.
8. A communication will be sent to tenants to advise them that we have completed our investigations and works and reaffirm any guidance they need to follow. This will formally close the case.

¹ Properties within the Disrepair Process will not be managed in the same way and any inspections, works and communications will be through the tenant's solicitor.

6.3 Case Management

There may be occasions where there are factors which make the standard process of inspecting and carrying out repairs more difficult, for example tenants in fuel poverty or where there is overcrowding.

A complex case panel has been established to record cases, actions required and decision making to support successful outcomes.

Case management decisions include the following:

- Initiating a temporary Decant property
- Approval for funding to support
- Agreement to apply management discretion for a direct let.
- Seeking support from other agencies

Each case is discussed on its own merit and may involve referral or case conference with other agencies.

7. Monitoring the effectiveness of the Protocol

7.1 Performance

The formal closing of a case will allow us to track the effectiveness of the investigation and repair process.

Where further reports of damp and mould are recorded, an inspection will be raised, these will be flagged as a 2nd visit and the previous repair number will be recorded in the text to ensure that staff are aware that the property has had previous inspections and work.

Second visits will take place and a review of information collected from the visit together with previous information and property history, will be held with the management team to identify issues not resolved at first contact.

The outcome of the review will be an action plan for the property and tenants will be prepared and discussed with the tenant.

The total numbers of damp and mould cases, status and how long they have been open, will be recorded and reported to the Corporate Management Team as part of the overall compliance reporting on a monthly basis.

The percentage of visits within the 14 day target will also be monitored to ensure that sufficient resources are maintained to support the robust approach to the management of damp and mould in our properties.

7.2 Review

The protocol will be reviewed annually but should there be any changes or recommendations the Social Housing Regulator it will be carried out earlier.