

Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 3 June 2021

Approach to Dampness, Mould and Condensation in Council Homes

Executive/routine Wards Council Commitments	Executive All
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1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee:
 - 1.1.1 Notes the improvements that are being put in place to manage dampness, mould and condensation issues; and
 - 1.1.2 Agrees to discharge the motion agreed by this Committee on 18 March 2021.

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Executive Director of Place

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Report

Approach to Dampness, Mould and Condensation in Council Homes

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 On [18 March 2021](#), the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee approved a motion which agreed to provide two additional reports alongside the Housing Service Improvement Plan (HSIP) Update: a report updating on the repairs improvement plan and a report on the process for dampness, mould and condensation; and
- 2.2 A separate report on the repairs improvement plan is also presented to this Committee.

3. Background

- 3.1 On [18 March 2021](#), the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee approved a motion from the Coalition which:
 - 3.1.1 Requested a second report specifically outlining the extent of requests to deal with damp, mould and condensation and an improved and effective approach which sets out a process for addressing these types of repairs. This process should include confirmation that the cause of an issue has been resolved, as well as all impacts including fully removing or treating damp, mould and damaged surfaces, reinstating them, and referring tenants for additional support, for example through Changeworks;
 - 3.1.2 Noted the challenges with operating under the current Covid-19 restrictions. Therefore, requests that a plan for operating under current restrictions is developed in the short term, prioritising addressing issues that cause a risk of harm, and that a further process is developed for implementation once restrictions are lifted; and
 - 3.1.3 Requested that this process would be fully developed and embedded in the repairs team through training, and implementation of a series of checks, to ensure that no tenant falls through the cracks.

4. Main report

- 4.1 Damp is the presence of unwanted moisture through the air, condensed on a surface or within the solid substance of a building, typically with detrimental or unpleasant effects. Excess moisture often leads to mould growth on building surfaces.
- 4.2 Moisture in buildings is commonly caused by leaking pipes, waste or overflow rain seeping in through the roof, spilling from a blocked gutter, penetrating around window frames, rising damp, or issues with the structure of the external walls.
- 4.3 Where the source of moisture is not related to structural faults, leaks or rising damp, it is usually due to condensation, which is often found to be the main issue when surveys are carried out.
- 4.4 **Humidity of indoor air:** Condensation appears when the indoor air in a room cannot hold the level of moisture. Warm air can hold more moisture than cold air. For example, running a bath causes steam. As the air in the bathroom fills up with water vapour, it can no longer hold all the moisture that it contains. As a result, tiny drops of water appear and develop first on cold surfaces, such as mirrors and windowsills.
- 4.5 **Low temperature:** Condensation can be worse when it is cold. When humid air comes into contact with cold surfaces, it transforms into surface mist and then into water, which runs down the window, causing wooden frames to rot and wallpaper and painted walls to blister.
- 4.6 **Poor ventilation:** Humidity of indoor air can be reduced by ventilation. If air exchange is inadequate, then humidity accumulates indoors and leads to increased condensation. In addition, walls remain cool when a lack of free movement of indoor air prevents warm air from reaching them. Mould may form where there is little movement of air, for example in a windowless room or behind wardrobes.
- 4.7 Normal everyday living results in a significant amount of moisture production. Cooking, laundry and washing are the most common sources of moisture in most homes. The average family produces 10 litres of moisture every day. Managing this moisture is a necessary and important element of day to day home management.
- 4.8 Even when adequate heating and ventilation are installed, dampness and mould growth may still occur. Concerns about heating costs, knowing how best to keep a home both warm and ventilated, and concerns over extractor fan noise can be contributing factors.
- 4.9 Supporting residents to heat and ventilate their homes can make significant improvements to levels of condensation and damp. For many, fuel poverty is a critical factor and this report outlines the measures in place to address this.

Resolving issues of Dampness, Mould and Condensation

- 4.10 Where there is dampness, mould or condensation identified in a property, we will take immediate action to investigate if there are any underlying issues such as poor external fabric, poorly performing heating systems, issues with windows or doors, or ineffective extractor fans. Where required, this may involve capital improvement works.
- 4.11 We will also simultaneously take action to remove any damp or mould from internal surfaces and treat or renew the affected areas and reinstate the property. This will be informed by a survey which will be carried out for every case by a qualified dampness surveyor who will provide a detailed report specifying the works required.
- 4.12 Where required, dehumidifiers will be provided to tenants where this can assist with addressing problems with condensation. Dehumidifiers would typically be required for a period of 2-4 weeks to dry out a room. The model used runs at an average cost of under £1 per day. Tenants are currently able to submit a claim to recover their costs; however, work is underway to improve this process by exploring options that would take the onus away from the tenant by providing funds at the outset that would cover the running cost of the dehumidifier for the duration it is required.
- 4.13 When all the required work has been completed, a team leader will visit the property to ensure that the work has been carried out correctly and the issues have been resolved. A follow up appointment with a team leader will also be scheduled to take place within an eight-week period to check in with the tenant to ensure that there are no further issues. If further action is found to be required, the team leader will visit again once these works are complete to ensure the issue is fully resolved.
- 4.14 Referrals to the Energy Advise Service (EAS) can be made to assist with supplementary advice and guidance where appropriate.
- 4.15 The revised process is set out at Appendix 1. This is designed to ensure that tenants are kept up to date and know what to expect at every step of the process.

Extent of Requests to Deal with Damp, Mould and Condensation

- 4.16 The table below shows the number of works orders for inspection and dampness orders over the last three years.

Year	Number of Inspections and Dampness Orders	% of all responsive repairs
2018/19	2,044	1.8%
2019/20	1,807	1.2%
2020/21*	429	0.2%

- 4.17 It is recognised that these figures reflect a degree of underreporting, in particular in 2020/21 where the relatively low number of reports has been exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19 which restricted dampness works. In addition, the way that these reports have been captured has now changed so that inspections can be recorded separately which will allow for a further breakdown of data to be available in future.
- 4.18 It is also acknowledged that there are localised areas where there is a concentration of dampness, mould and condensation issues due to, for example, the construction/structure of the buildings.
- 4.19 An example of this is at the multi-storey properties in Muirhouse in the North West of the city, where issues are affecting a number of tenants' homes. Significant capital investment is planned to remedy the root cause of these issues, and work is underway to proactively engage with tenants and residents in the area to ensure that any homes affected are identified and appropriate remedial action taken.

Process Pre-lockdown and During Lockdown Restrictions

- 4.20 Prior to the outbreak of Covid-19 and lockdown in March 2020, dampness, mould and condensation issues were dealt with in line with the standard repairs process.
- 4.21 The Covid-19 restrictions resulted in the Housing Repairs service moving to an essential repairs service only. While these restrictions have been in place, it has been challenging to ensure all required dampness, mould and condensation work is identified, scheduled and completed. Initially, only the treatment of the cause of the dampness, mould or condensation was categorised as an essential repair. The categorisation of essential repairs was subsequently revised to also include the removal of mould or black spot in January 2021.
- 4.22 For all repair jobs, although response time is determined by the type of repair issue, there is discretion for a more tailored response to be arranged to take into account vulnerabilities or other relevant factors. Under the Covid-19 restrictions, there has been a greater reliance on the call handler screening process to identify any vulnerabilities or other factors that could cause a risk of harm.

Improvements to the Process for managing Dampness, Mould and Condensation

- 4.23 Recognising that there have been issues in the process of dealing with cases of dampness, mould and condensation, a revised process has been developed to deliver a robust, streamlined process from start to finish.
- 4.24 This process focuses on the customer journey and ensuring tenants know what to expect at every stage of the process.
- 4.25 The new process is outlined in Appendix 1 and is designed to provide clarity on timescales and expectations of repair and to improve communication should tenants have ongoing questions.

- 4.26 Tenants will also be supported to access independent practical support and advice from the EAS on a range of measures to reduce energy costs and increase energy efficiency, to complement the improvements to the process for managing dampness, mould and condensation.
- 4.27 This improved process will be introduced at the end of May 2021 and has been safely accommodated in line with current restrictions, although it is recognised that safe working practices and the potential for increased demand at the outset may impact on targeted timescales for works to be carried out. Timescales will be communicated to each tenant to ensure these are clear.
- 4.28 Tenant satisfaction surveys are issued to a sample of tenants following completion of a repair. This will include tenants who have experienced repair works as part of the process to resolve dampness, mould and condensation. This feedback will be used to identify any on-going issues, to refine the service and to make improvements in training or communication (if necessary).

Capital Investment and Complex Cases

- 4.29 If the issue is caused by defective external factors, such as harling, the process for remedying the issue is likely to involve short term works initially until the longer-term capital works can be carried out. The reason for this approach is that capital works generally have a longer lead-in time to allow for development of the scope of works and procurement of contractors. Once the capital work is complete, there may be a requirement to re-do some of the interim measures as they may have deteriorated during this time (e.g. replacement plasterboard may be required). The interim measures should not require further replacement after this point as the capital works should resolve the underlying issue.
- 4.30 Effective, ongoing communication will be vital for cases where capital works are required, to ensure the tenant is kept updated. This is particularly important in cases where there is mixed tenure ownership; as in these instances, owner consent may be required to progress works impacting on delivery timescales.
- 4.31 Where there is found to be multiple tenants in an area reporting dampness, mould or condensation, such as in a multi-storey, engagement is carried out with tenants and residents to ensure all issues are identified, and appropriate remedial action taken including repairs and capital improvements work where required.

Operating Under Continued Restrictions

- 4.32 Physical distancing measures and safe-working practices are likely to remain a feature of repairs service delivery for some time, and the safety of tenants and operatives remains the key priority. The process for dampness, mould and condensation has been designed to be managed safely from start to finish under the current restrictions. Team leaders will review incoming jobs to plan an appropriate response, taking into account any vulnerabilities or other factors.

4.33 However, it is important to recognise that safe working practices are expected to continue to have an impact on performance. In particular, timescales for work being carried out will be impacted as multi-trade appointments may not be possible, or operatives may have to carry out jobs in a more tailored way, depending on the space available and the type of work required.

4.34 In light of the considerable reduction in dampness, mould and condensation referrals in 2020/21, compared to previous years, it is expected that a backlog of cases may be identified and therefore an initial spike in demand may have a short-term impact on timescales while the service catches up.

The number of cases will be closely monitored over the first month and steps will be taken, if required, to prioritise based on need and vulnerability. The overall objective will be to work through all cases as efficiently as possible, without compromising on the level of service provided. Data from previous years shows a considerable rise in cases reported during the winter months, therefore the service will aim to work through the expected backlog and effectively embed the improved process before the winter.

Investing in Homes to make them Cheaper and Easier to Heat

4.35 In some instances, the challenges of heating the home can be exacerbated by the condition of buildings, particularly in older properties which can be more difficult and costly to heat. The Council is investing significantly in homes to make them easier and cheaper to heat. In the last six years, over half of Council homes have benefited from energy efficiency measures including new heating systems, insulation and new windows and front doors.

4.36 A Whole House Retrofit (WHR) programme is currently in development. This will inform the Council's long-term investment approach for existing homes from 2023 onwards.

4.37 The WHR approach will prioritise advanced whole house retrofit measures, which will help to design out poor performance and future maintenance risks.

4.38 Once completed, homes will be better insulated, ventilated and affordable to heat.

4.39 It is expected that a range of approaches will be proposed through the WHR depending on specific building archetypes. This will include installation of new technologies such as ventilation systems, and advanced/smart heating controls etc.

4.40 Appropriate use of these types of technologies will be key to their success. If not used correctly, they could nullify the benefits or negatively impact the measures installed.

4.41 Bespoke support and guidance for tenants will be essential to the rollout of these new technologies, ensuring that tenants understand how to operate these new technologies and what the benefits are.

Support with Energy Efficiency and Heating the Home

- 4.42 Consultation has consistently shown that making homes easier and cheaper to heat is a key priority for tenants. This has been reinforced by the findings of the Edinburgh Poverty Commission, which shared examples of households in fuel poverty who had faced incredibly difficult household decisions between heating their home or eating.
- 4.43 The Council set up a dedicated EAS in 2018 to provide advice and support for tenants on energy efficiency and heating their homes. The service is delivered by Changeworks and provides tenants with a range of support, including:
- 4.43.1 Help to reduce energy use and carbon emissions through improved understanding of energy efficiency, such as how to use heating systems more effectively;
 - 4.43.2 Support for tenants in communicating with energy suppliers, helping to access supplier discounts or to switch to a cheaper tariff; and
 - 4.43.3 Support to manage energy bills and to access grants and funding for energy efficiency improvements.
- 4.44 To date, the EAS has supported nearly 3,000 households, with financial savings for tenants totalling over £590,000 and carbon savings of 1,485 tonnes. This service is available to all Council tenants across the city and can play an important role in complementing the improved process for dampness, mould and condensation. As detailed in Appendix 1, tenants who have reported dampness, mould or condensation will be supported to access the EAS with an optional referral from their housing officer built in as part of the process.
- Whilst the EAS offers dedicated support around energy efficiency and energy costs, fuel poverty is often an indicator of wider financial hardship and heating the home is often a secondary priority for households facing other financial pressures. There are a range of Council and external services which provide broader advice and support, including the Income Maximisation Service and the Advice Shop, as well as external agencies. As part of housing officer engagement with tenants, signposting or referrals to the most appropriate service are carried out when household budgeting issues are identified. Tenant engagement with these services is optional and some tenants chose not to take up this support for a variety of reasons. Housing officers continue to work with tenants to promote these services; to support tenants to access these services; and to help make this as accessible as possible.
- 4.45 Recognising the impact of fuel poverty on household budgets, steps are being taken to prevent tenants being financially burdened by measures to remedy dampness, mould and condensation in the home. Where dehumidifiers are required to help combat condensation, the Housing Service will meet the running costs of these.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The process will be enhanced by introducing automation and digital improvements at various points in the process. For example, an improved self-service portal would allow tenants to report and track the issue online.
- 5.2 A pilot project is currently in development as part of the Council's Smart Cities initiative to trial new smart home technology to help combat dampness. Property environment sensors will initially be installed in around 100 homes to monitor the levels of damp in the property. This technology will trigger an alert when thresholds are breached, to allow early action to be taken.
- 5.3 The implementation of a new Asset Management IT system will be an integral element for the longer-term strategy, as it will have the functionality to highlight localised dampness hot spots at a city-wide level. It will also enable defective external factors such as leaking roofs or windows which require capital funding to be repaired at an earlier stage, therefore the effect of dampness, mould and condensation on tenant's lives will be greatly reduced. The Asset Management system will also need to track any interim measures prior to capital investment programmes, to avoid any unnecessary repeat works.
- 5.4 Longer-term, as part of capital improvement works there is scope to consider the role of energy efficient technology, such as solar panels, to help reduce the running costs in the home.
- 5.5 The process for dampness, mould and condensation will be continually monitored to pick up any emerging issues. A detailed review will be undertaken after a three-month period, to allow time for the process to be embedded and an assessment can then be made of its effectiveness.
- 5.6 This will include a review of tenant satisfaction feedback and any complaints received. Further tenant engagement will also be undertaken at this stage. This will complement an existing in-depth review of a sample of escalated complaints, which includes cases where dampness, mould and condensation issues have been present.
- 5.7 There will also be a review meeting with the EAS at this point to review how the referral process is working and to pick up any opportunities to further improve this
- 5.8 This review point will also present an opportunity to review any further training and support required for staff involved in dealing with cases of dampness, condensation and mould
- 5.9 Fuel Poverty is a focus for the Scottish Government, with the Fuel Poverty (Targets, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Act passed by Parliament in June 2019. The Act is due to be followed by a comprehensive strategy to show how the targets of the Act would be met. The final Fuel Poverty Strategy was due to be published in September 2020, but its development was paused due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Once published, the Housing Service will review closely to ensure alignment with its strategic objectives.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The repairs service is paid for by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The HRA is funded from tenants' rents, fees and service charges for services provided to tenants and assets held on the HRA account.
- 6.2 There are no direct financial implications arising from the revised process. Dampness works are carried out as responsive repairs which are funded through revenue expenditure and contained within existing budgets.
- 6.3 Where capital investment is required, this would be programmed as part of the capital investment programme. Programmed capital improvements at a number of multi-storey blocks in the North West of the city, which include measures to address dampness, are already identified within the HRA Capital Investment Programme.
- 6.4 Changeworks have already been procured to provide an EAS, and the guidance they will provide to tenants on energy efficiency and heating the home is part of their existing remit.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 The Council has an extensive programme of consultation and engagement with tenants, including surveys, focus groups, working groups, and resident and community meetings. In response to Covid-19, arrangements have been put in place to ensure tenant engagement can continue in a safe and accessible way.
- 7.2 Repairs satisfaction surveys recommenced in February 2021, having been paused due to Covid-19. The Contact Centre carry out telephone surveys with a sample of tenants who have recently had a completed repair. The survey captures the details of the repair job, and tenant satisfaction across a range of indicators: helpfulness and knowledge of the call handler; clarity and choice with timeslots if applicable; politeness and tidiness of the operative; quality of work; number of visits required to complete; arrangements for follow-on if applicable; and overall satisfaction. Tenants are also able to provide additional comments to expand on their answers. The data is shared with Housing Property on a weekly basis for analysis, identification of issues, monitoring of trends and follow-up action if required.
- 7.3 A Resolution Team has been introduced to drive a shift from complaints management to complaints resolution. Whilst the revised process for dampness, mould and condensation seeks to ensure robust tenant communication from start to finish and the team leader would work with the tenant to resolve any issues as

they arise, the Resolution Team enables tenants to raise complaints if they are dissatisfied with the service they have received.

- 7.4 The three-month review point in the new process for dampness, mould and condensation will include a focus group with tenants to seek feedback on how the process is working from their perspective and to capture any opportunities for further improvement.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 [Housing Sustainability Update](#); Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee, 4 November 2020.

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1 – Revised Dampness Process.
- 9.2 Appendix 2 - Dampness Service Standards.

Appendix 1: Revised Process for Dampness, Mould and Condensation (May 2021 onwards)

A revised process has been developed to deliver a robust, streamlined process from start to finish. The revised process is focused on the customer journey and ensuring tenants know what to expect at every step of the process. This process was introduced in May 2021. The process can be safely accommodated in line with current restrictions, although it is recognised that safe working practices and the potential for increased demand at the outset may impact on targeted timescales for the survey and follow-on works to be carried out. Timescales will be communicated clearly to tenant on a case by case basis.

Within each locality, Housing Property team leaders will manage this new process, which is summarised below:

- Step 1.** Tenant reports dampness, mould or condensation to Repairs Direct – a pro forma has been developed to ensure key information is captured.
- Step 2.** Appointment raised for survey for all reported cases of dampness, mould and condensation cases. Locality team leader to be named as the point of contact for the report.
- Step 3.** Survey carried out by in-house surveyor or specialist sub-contractor (both follow the same process). The target timescale for a survey to be carried out is 21 days from date of request.
- Step 4.** The team leader will review the survey report and will contact the tenant to check if any additional assistance or information is required before works are progressed. They will then arrange suitable appointments for all necessary work to be carried out, including anti-fungal treatments and painting where required.
- Step 5.** The tenant will be contacted in writing to confirm the outcome of the survey, the next steps and timescales for any required works to be carried out. This communication will also include information on steps the household can take to help ensure the long-term effectiveness of repairs. Tenants will also be offered a referral through their housing officer to the EAS. The EAS can offer further advice on making the home more energy efficient, reducing energy use and costs, and advice to help reduce moisture within the home.
- Step 6.** The team leader will ensure all work takes place as arranged, taking account of individual circumstances and any additional support required for the tenant. An inspection of all works will be carried out following completion.
- Step 7.** A follow up inspection will be scheduled for eight weeks after the repair to ensure they have resolved the issue. If the issue has been resolved, no further action is required.

Step 8. If the works have not fully resolved the issue, the team leader will carry out further investigation to ensure the issue is resolved. Step 7 would be repeated to ensure the issue is resolved.

Appendix 2: Service Standards for Dampness, Mould and Condensation

Please note the timescales below may not be achievable when the process is first rolled out, due to potential for heightened demand and elongated timescales as a result of safe working practices.

Our Tenants can expect:

- The call handler will ask for specific details of the areas affected and how this is affecting you and your household;
- To be given a named point of contact;
- Your locality housing officer will be made aware that you have raised issues in relation to dampness, mould or condensation;
- A survey will take place within 21 days of you raising your concerns;
- The root cause will be identified, and a plan put in place to resolve the issue. This may take time if capital investment is required. If capital investment is required, it is expected an interim solution will be put in place;
- A written response on the findings from the survey will be sent to you;
- To be kept up to date with progress and to be consulted on how and when the works will take place. If you require additional support, for example removal of furniture, this will be provided;
- Advice and guidance will be provided on how to keep your home warm and ventilated. You will also have the option of being referred to the Energy Advice Service, delivered by Changeworks, for energy advice and support with how to heat your home in the most cost-effective way. Any remedial work required will also be arranged and carried out;
- The opportunity to leave feedback on the works and experience to be made available;
- A follow up appointment will be arranged for approximately eight weeks after work is completed to check the issue has been resolved fully; and
- If major works or shared ownership repairs works are required, you and other residents affected will be informed and consulted.