

# Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 20 January 2022

## Update on Dampness, Mould and Condensation in Council Homes and Asset Management Strategy

Executive/routine Wards Council Commitments	Executive All
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### 1. Recommendations

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- 1.1 It is recommended that the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee notes:
  - 1.1.1 This update on the improvements that have been put in place to manage dampness, mould and condensation issues;
  - 1.1.2 The details of the early review which was carried out and recommendations are being taken forward to improve the process; and
  - 1.1.3 The update on the development of an asset management strategy.

**Paul Lawrence**

Executive Director of Place

Contact: Willie Gilhooly, Acting Housing Property Manager

E-mail: [willie.gilhooly@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:willie.gilhooly@edinburgh.gov.uk) | Tel: 0131 529 7866

## Update on Dampness, Mould and Condensation in Council Homes and Asset Management Strategy

### 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1 On [3 June 2021](#), the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee agreed an improved process to manage issues of dampness, mould and condensation in Council homes and requested an update in six months.
- 2.2 This report provides an update on progress with implementing the new process and, following an early review, on the recommendations that are being taken forward to improve the process. The report also provides an update on the development of an asset management strategy.

### 3. Background

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- 3.1 On [18 March 2021](#), the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee approved a motion which agreed to provide two additional reports to the June Committee 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.
- 3.2 On [3 June 2021](#), a report to the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee set out the new process that had been developed to manage issues of dampness, mould and condensation in Council homes. Committee agreed the new process and also approved an amendment from the Coalition which agreed that:
  - 3.2.1 A process should be developed to make sure that data from repairs logged in relation to damp, mould and condensation is collated and then used as part of the asset management strategy to help inform future capital investment, including the whole house retrofit programme as outlined in the housing sustainability report; and
  - 3.2.2 A further report should be brought back in six months to update on the asset management strategy, how data is monitored to ensure investment is targeted to where it is needed most alongside an analysis of the

implementation of the new processes including data on the number of cases where mould has been removed and reinstatement work carried out.

## 4. Main report

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- 4.1 A revised process for managing cases of dampness, mould and condensation in Council homes was introduced in June 2021. This process was designed around the customer journey, with tenants to be given a named point of contact and regular updates throughout the process.
- 4.2 Under the new process, every case reported is surveyed by a qualified dampness surveyor to identify the issue, the cause and the steps required to remedy the issue.
- 4.3 In the short term, issues are addressed through responsive repairs and remedial works where appropriate, with action taken to remove any damp or mould from internal surfaces, and to treat or renew the affected areas and reinstate the property.
- 4.4 Where an underlying issue is found, such as poor external fabric or issues with windows and doors, this may involve capital improvement works. In these instances, remedial works are undertaken to manage the issue until capital works are completed to resolve the underlying cause.
- 4.5 The new process aimed to deliver on a range of objectives including:
  - 4.5.1 Improving communication;
  - 4.5.2 Providing a direct point of contact for customers;
  - 4.5.3 Undertaking a survey for every reported case;
  - 4.5.4 Increased sense of ownership; and ultimately,
  - 4.5.5 All issues resolved to the tenant's satisfaction.
- 4.6 A workshop was held with the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee members on 18 August 2021 to discuss the new process in further detail. Early case numbers and emerging findings were discussed, along with plans for a comprehensive review to be carried out three-months after the process was introduced. The workshop also considered the updates to be brought back to Committee, including further updates on case numbers and how data is continuing to inform the asset management strategy. The remainder of this report provides an update on the information requested.

### **Early Review - Cases and Causes**

- 4.5 The review at the end of the first three months of the implementation of the new process showed that, as at mid-November, there had been 495 dampness cases received citywide, broken down as follows:

- North West – 230 cases;
  - North East – 81 cases;
  - South East – 95 cases; and
  - South West – 89 cases.
- 4.7 Almost half of these cases were received in the eight weeks prior to mid-November and were yet to be surveyed. A third of the total cases had completed surveys and 10% of cases were closed off, with all necessary works and follow-on checks complete.
- 4.8 Of the 167 cases surveyed, a breakdown of the emerging data on the cause of the issue is set out at Appendix 1. Based on the data emerging from cases surveyed in the review, the source of the issue has predominantly related to defective/missing fans, lack of heating/ ventilation or leaks from above.
- 4.9 These initial findings indicate that there is currently a varied number of sources creating dampness and water ingress within the tenants' homes. Each case requires to be individually assessed in order to identify the works required to rectify the issue.
- 4.10 In around 10% of cases surveyed, further investigation has been required as the source of the issue could not be identified on a first survey. For example, in instances where high levels of moisture are identified behind concealed surfaces such as under floors, behind ceilings or above, it may be necessary to expose the areas and carry out further investigations to accurately identify the problem and appropriate remedial action.
- 4.11 Survey reports record findings and identify further works that may be required (for example, external defects such as harling or roof covering). To date, the majority of the works identified as required have been addressed without having to progress through the capital programme. However, officers will continue to consider issues that could be impacting on a number of properties and might best be addressed through the capital programme as part of each case reported.

### **Three-month Review**

- 4.12 When the new process was introduced, a commitment was made that a comprehensive review would be carried out after a period of three months. This was to allow time for the process to be embedded before making an early assessment of its effectiveness, whilst still enabling improvements to be made at a relatively early stage.
- 4.13 This review was undertaken in October 2021, involving a number of strands of work including:
- 4.13.1 Case analysis;
  - 4.13.2 In-depth officer feedback;

- 4.13.3 Analysis of tenant satisfaction;
  - 4.13.4 Complaints analysis; and
  - 4.13.5 Feedback from Changeworks, who deliver the Energy Advice Service (EAS).
- 4.14 The review found collective agreement that the principles and aims behind the process were correct. However, the process has proved challenging to manage operationally, with additional resources needed to support the delivery.
- 4.15 A number of recommendations were agreed at the conclusion of this review and are being taken forward. These include:
- 4.15.1 Recruitment of an additional qualified dampness surveyor to deal the number of cases being reported;
  - 4.15.2 Administrative support for the officers managing the cases, with a focus on improving the communications with tenants. This includes preparing and issuing comprehensive letters in a timely manner;
  - 4.15.3 Changeworks referral built in earlier in the process to reinforce the advice and information that is available to all tenants through the EAS. Particularly in cases where no major remedial works are required, this advice can be beneficial to support tenants with energy affordability and guidance on heating and ventilating the home;
  - 4.15.4 Enhanced contract management to improve performance and productivity in cases where sub-contractors are deployed. All contracts have robust management arrangements, with key performance indicators and contractual targets set and are monitored continuously throughout the delivery of the contract; and
  - 4.15.5 Review of training and support requirements for staff involved in dealing with cases of dampness, condensation and mould.
- 4.16 An action plan has been created with these recommendations and is being tracked weekly until fully completed.

### **Asset Management Strategy**

- 4.17 The Whole House Retrofit (WHR) approach which is currently being developed will help to prevent some of the current damp and mould issues from reoccurring. The WHR approach will champion a fabric first approach, with the aim of ensuring that a property operates in an energy-efficient manner with energy demand significantly reduced. Central to this will be ensuring that that improvements are carried out in an organised way, with retrofit measures and technologies complementing each other and not working against each other. This will help to ensure that issues such as ventilation, air quality and damp management are managed effectively and holistically to eliminate the build-up of moisture in the home. Tenant engagement will be an essential component of the wider WHR strategy.

- 4.18 As reported on 3 June 2021 the WHR two-year implementation plan is now currently underway and involves three overlapping core workstreams, these are detailed below with current time frames and progress to date. All three workstreams will underpin the final development of the WHR strategy and implementation plan due to be finalised by 2023.
- 4.18.1 **WHR Design Principles** - Phase 1 is currently on track and due to complete in January 2022. This phase is assessing all common housing archetypes and will outline the costs and technical interventions required to meet a range of advanced retrofit standards;
- 4.18.2 Following completion of Phase 1, the most appropriate retrofit standard will be selected to be progressed on to Phase 2 where detailed design and performance specification will be developed for each common archetype. Phase 3 will progress six WHR pilot projects across the six most common housing archetypes. Both Phases 2 and 3 will run consecutively throughout 2022;
- 4.18.3 **Stock condition Surveys (low rise)** – this commission is now live and a software application is being developed by the contractor for the gathering of survey data to ensure compatibility with internal ICT systems. Following this a small number of pilot surveys will be progressed to assess and refine the survey format and data. The wider programme will then then be rolled out across the city from January 2022 with an expected completion of June 2023; and
- 4.18.4 **Stock condition Surveys (high rise)** – the final scope for condition surveys across all high-rise blocks is currently in development and is estimated to be finalised by January 2022. It is estimated that the start date will be Spring 2022 with an 18-month timeframe for completion of the programme.

## 5. Next Steps

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- 5.1 To complete all actions identified from the three-month review as set out at 4.15.
- 5.2 The process will be enhanced by digital improvements including the current Verint project to deliver a self-service portal which will allow tenants to report and track issue online.
- 5.3 A Corporate pilot project is currently in development as part of the Council's Smart Cities initiative to trail new smart home technology environmental sensors to help combat dampness. This should alert Council officers to cases at an earlier stage when dampness presents enabling early action to be taken.
- 5.4 The implementation of a new Asset Management IT system will also be an integral element for the longer-term strategy. This project has now been approved and is in

the development phase, with implementation targeted for June 2022 subject to ICT co-dependencies.

## **6. Financial impact**

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- 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 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 to deliver energy efficiency measures are underway at a number of multi-storey blocks in the North West of the city through the HRA Capital Investment Programme. By delivering large scale upgrades to improve the thermal efficiency of the building and reduce energy consumption, this will assist tenants in heating their homes and therefore have a positive impact in addressing issues of dampness, mould and condensation. Works have started at Gunnet Court, and May Court is due to start in December 2021.

## **7. Stakeholder/Community Impact**

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- 7.1 Repairs satisfaction surveys recommenced in February 2021, having been paused due to Covid-19. The repairs satisfaction survey has been adapted and is now available on the Consultation Hub to all tenants who have had a repair. This means that more tenants are now able to share their feedback, supporting the service to continue to improve and address issues. Tenants without online access are able to receive a postal copy of the survey to ensure inclusivity. This data is fed into management information for regular scrutiny.
- 7.2 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 throughout the process and that a team leader will 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.
- 7.3 As part of the three-month review of the new process, analysis was carried out on the complaints received relating to dampness, mould or condensation. This complemented a previous deep-dive exercise to review a sample of escalated complaints, around half of which related to dampness. The review found that the majority of complaints related to delays, which further reinforces the case analysis

and the recommendations agreed to improve and accelerate the flow of the process.

- 7.4 The three-month review also included a review meeting with the EAS to review how the referral process is working and to pick up any opportunities to further improve this. This has fed into the recommendations to bring this referral forward in the process.

## **8. Background reading/external references**

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- 8.1 [Housing Sustainability Update](#); Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee, 4 November 2020.
- 8.2 [Approach to Dampness Mould and Condensation in Council Homes](#); Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee, 3 June 2021.

## **9. Appendices**

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- 9.1 Appendix 1 - Emerging data on the source of the issue

**Appendix 1 – Emerging source of issue data on cases surveyed (as at mid-November 2021)**

The data below is based on 127 cases where ‘source of issue’ was available (due to a reporting error, ‘source of issue’ data had not been captured in a comparable format for one of the four localities. This has been picked up as part of the review and will be addressed going forward to ensure a complete citywide picture.)

<b>Cause of Issue</b>	<b>No. of cases</b>	<b>% of cases</b>
Defective/Missing Fans	31	24%
Lack of Heating/Ventilation	21	17%
Leak from Above	21	17%
Further Investigation Required	13	10%
Bath/Shower	8	6%
Roof Leak	7	6%
Defective Wet Floor	6	5%
Defective Stack	3	2%
External Render	3	2%
New Ceiling Required	2	2%
Lack of Pipe Insulation/ Defective Pipe	2	2%
Toilet Leak	2	2%
External Water Ingress	2	2%
Leaking Tank	1	<1%
Kitchen/Bathroom Works	1	<1%
Aspergillus Niger (mould)	1	<1%
Cored Hole In Wall	1	<1%
Double Glazing	1	<1%
Boiler	1	<1%