

Report to: Housing Review Board



Date of Meeting 18<sup>th</sup> January 2023

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

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## Damp and Mould Policy

### Report summary:

This report provides a context for and an explanation of the rise in concerns about damp and mould and why East Devon District Council have introduced a Damp and Mould Policy. The report recognises the serious health impacts that damp and mould can have on the occupiers and the need to take meaningful action as a social housing landlord that aims to provide a decent home for its tenants.

### Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes  No

Policy Framework Yes  No

### Recommendation:

That the Housing Review Board consider the content and adopt the Damp & Mould Policy.

### Reason for recommendation:

The HRB notes that the Housing Service desire to manage and proactively address all damp and mould issues identified within our Housing portfolio.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- Economy and Assets
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

**Equalities impact** Low Impact

**Climate change** Low Impact

**Risk:** Low Risk; Manage the Health & Safety Risk that can impact from damp & mould

## Links to background information .

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

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- Better homes and communities for all
- A greener East Devon
- A resilient economy

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Over recent months the prevalence of damp and mould in social housing, including the failings to address the same has become national headlines in both the press and on television. The seriousness and the impact on individual's health was highlighted by the very sad death of a young child living in social housing in Rochdale. As a reaction to this the Government/Regulator have asked every Housing provider to answer some probing questions that seek to establish their current position in relation to this matter. Our response was submitted on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2022; a copy of our response is appended to this report (**annex 1**).
- 1.2 The issues surrounding damp and mould highlighted the need to have a specific policy and process in place for the management of damp and mould. We want to do this in a proactive way recognising the zero tolerance approach being advocated, and avoiding the lifestyle accusation often levelled at tenants.

### 2. Background

- 2.1 East Devon District Council is committed to maintaining tenant's homes to a high standard, which adds value to the homes and their surroundings. We recognise that maintaining high quality, secure homes can improve the lives of our customers and achieve high levels of customer satisfaction.
- 2.2 This damp and mould policy is written to ensure that wherever possible tenants are not adversely affected by the causes of damp and mould. It drives forward an agenda of proactive action to manage and eradicate cases of damp and mould.
- 2.3 This policy will be supported by a detailed process for the management of damp and mould cases to ensure they are effectively managed and the issue resolved.
- 2.4 Basic training will be provided for all Officers and Repairs Advisors to help identify and detect signs of minor damp and mould, along with general guidance for tenants on how this can be managed.

### 3. East Devon District Council Commitments

- 3.1 On report of a damp and mould issue in a property:
- We will undertake effective investigations and implement all reasonable remedial repair solutions and improvements to eradicate damp, including managing and controlling condensation in line with our Damp and Mould procedure.
  - If the outcome of the inspection shows that condensation is causing the problem, we will eradicate the mould and provide advice to Tenants with regard to heating and ventilating their home and also on simple measures that can be taken to prevent a re-occurrence of the problem.

- Where fuel poverty is identified as a factor then we will offer support through Estate Management, Mobile Support Officers and/or our Financial Resilience team.
- Where damp is identified, we will carry out repair works to areas that are affected in accordance with our Damp and Mould procedure.
- Where extensive works are required, we may take a decision that decanting tenants from their property is necessary whilst works are undertaken.
- Review all cases of damp and mould periodically after any works have taken place to ensure it is eradicated from the property and the issues fully resolved.

#### **4. Our Responsibilities**

4.1 As Landlord East Devon District Council are responsible for:

- Maintaining the fabric of the property to prevent penetrating and rising damp.
- Carrying out all remedial action to address damp and mould occurrences as and when they are identified/reported.
- Maintaining the property in accordance with current statutory regulations and legislation.
- Ensuring that wherever possible tenants are not adversely affected by the causes of damp and mould.

4.2 Our proposed draft damp and mould policy is included in **annex 2**.

#### **5. Next Steps**

5.1 We intend to develop and implement a detailed process complete with definitive timescales for the management and eradication of damp and mould.

5.2 We will provide training to members of the Housing Team that visit properties to ensure that they have a full understanding of the signs of damp and mould within properties and that they are fully aware of their responsibility to report such issues to the Property & asset Team so that it can be managed in accordance with the Damp & Mould Policy/process.

5.3 The advisory content on the website that relates to damp and mould will be kept up to date and relevant.

5.4 We will also send out messages on social media the offer advice on simple steps that can be taken to minimise the risk of damp and mould occurring, this will include simple advice on cleaning areas.

5.5 In terms of communications we will be publishing an article relating to damp and mould in a future issue of the Housing Matters publication, and include an advisory leaflet relating to damp and mould in all welcome packs issued to Tenants moving into our properties.

5.6 We plan to review historic reported cases of damp and mould held on our systems to check the action taken and to ensure that the issue has been resolved.

5.7 Key to managing cases will be to develop a system of managing damp and mould cases on our Open Housing system.

5.8 We are working with our Stock Condition Surveyors to develop a process for the reporting of damp and mould issues as and when they identify the same during the surveys that they undertake.

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**Financial implications:**

It is envisaged that following the policy and procedures identified can be met within existing budgets. If this is found not to be the case then a further report will be presented to the Board.

**Legal implications:**

The policy links in to the Service's duty of care as a social landlord under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, Defective Premises Act 1972 and the Homes (Fitness for Habitation) Act 2018.

## Annex 1

### Response to the Government/Regulator referenced in paragraph 1.1 of this Report:

#### **Q3 - Please detail your approach to assessing the extent of damp and mould issues affecting your properties, including how you assess the prevalence of category 1 and 2 damp and mould hazards**

In September 2022, we began a complete stock condition survey of all our 4,200 properties. All properties will be surveyed over the next 12 to 18 months. The aim of the survey is to assess the age and condition of the major elements of the buildings, fitness for purpose, need for maintenance and existence of components and capacity to meet performance requirements.

We are seeking to gain as much information about our stock as possible, and have developed a comprehensive list of components for checking, including all the roofline areas, pointing, insulation, chimneys, flashings, roof lights, heating type, damp proof course, air bricks, windows and doors, and all other major components.

We will also be carrying out an energy audit of all of our properties as part of the survey to assess the energy efficiency of homes and check any potential improvements that will impact on the running cost of homes.

The survey will also include a Health and Safety Risk Assessment (HHSRS), and will include the requirement to provide photographic records to support any specific maintenance or structural issues, and to identify any Category 1 or 2 hazards.

This comprehensive approach will identify any existing mould and damp problems, but also areas where there is a risk of such problems developing. Whilst the Stock Survey is being carried out any issues relating to emergency repairs or Category 1 or 2 hazards are being reported to us immediately for rectification and are not waiting for the completion of the Stock Condition Survey in its entirety.

#### **Q4 - In the context of the approach detailed in Q3, please provide details of your most recent assessment of the extent of damp and mould hazards in your homes, including the prevalence of category 1 and 2 damp and mould hazards**

Our housing stock is mainly traditionally built and pre-war construction. We also have mostly low-rise and low density properties. Anecdotally we find that the majority of damp and mould issues we encounter are as a result of condensation rather than penetrative or rising damp.

As previously mentioned, we have just started a comprehensive stock condition survey looking at 100% of our properties. While we are waiting for the results of this process to come through, we have been interrogating our housing system to assess the extent of damp and mould issues in our housing stock. Reports produced from our system suggest around 430 properties had repairs related to damp dealt with in the last year; these cases are now under review to determine the extent of any damp issues as they could stretch from a small patch of mould caused by condensation, to a serious case of penetrating damp.

Following the review of these cases we aim to set out a works review schedule to follow up on any damp/mould works completed. We will also carry out an analysis of these cases, identifying any potential clusters of cases or building type issues. This will enable us to investigate other similar properties or other homes in the same location to proactively investigate potential mould and damp problems.

Due to the way that damp and mould issues have been reported and recorded historically, it is not possible to accurately ascertain the prevalence of category 1 and 2 damp and mould hazards using existing data. However, we are in the process of setting up our systems to enable us to do so in the future. Our current stock condition survey will record this information, providing us with an accurate baseline moving forwards. Around 7% of properties surveyed so far have had damp or mould issues identified, but this is based on only a small proportion of our total stock.

Given the current cost of living issues, and the potential change of tenants and lifestyles, we are conscious that any historical data we hold may only offer a limited picture of the condition of our properties overall. However, we will work with the information we hold alongside the firmer data coming from our new surveys as it feeds into our system.

**Q5 - Given the findings of the assessment outline in Q4, please outline the actions you are taking to remedy any issues and hazards, and ensure that you homes meet the Decent Homes Standard**

Damp and mould works are already part of our existing repairs and maintenance contract with works carried out by specialist subcontractors. However, following a review of procedure we are now looking to embed a specialist damp surveyor within both the council and our contractor to further strengthen our response to these issues.

Our planned works programme of roofing replacement (with supplementary insulation works undertaken alongside where required), the installation of damp proofing, repointing of brickwork, and installation of new windows and doors all address issues of mould and damp. This work sits alongside our decarbonisation plan, where we are taking a fabric first, worst first approach to upgrading our housing stock. We are confident that the improved insulation and increased thermal capacity of our stock, will help to reduce the number of damp and mould issues we encounter, as part of our commitment to provide a warm and safe home environment for our tenants.

We are also reviewing our void standard to ensure adequate ventilation and insulation is maintained in all our homes, with void works undertaken to remedy any underlying issues that might cause damp to minimise disruption to tenants where possible.

Tenant support is also a vital component; we already provide tenants with a damp and mould leaflet, providing advice and information on how they can help to reduce the risk of mould developing through natural ventilation and other behavioural changes. We are also looking to develop videos and literature to explain how to operate heating systems effectively to minimise the risk of condensation.

We have reviewed our damp and mould policy and procedure to ensure that it remains fit for purpose, and in line with the most recent guidance and legislation, and are in the process of making minor amendments to ensure that any serious damp and mould issues are handled as a priority. Tenants are being consulted on these changes so they can input into the policy.

We will be utilising the broader housing staff, contractor visits, and reinvigorating our estate officers to report cases they encounter on their tenant visits. We will also be training our staff to provide tips and advice to our tenants on how to avoid condensation. This will involve some work to upskill staff so that they can identify issues.

We will also be looking at the potential to broaden our use of monitoring equipment with tenant consent where we encounter severe damp and mould issues or in properties that are higher risk.

**Q6 - Please tell us how you ensure that individual damp and mould cases are identified and dealt with promptly and effectively when raised by tenants and residents**

We have reviewed our procedures in relation to damp and mould cases to ensure that we provide the most suitable response on an individual case by case basis. Any report of damp will prompt an investigation from a trained damp and mould surveyor. They will assess the cause and severity of the issue, and report back accordingly. A mould wash is done at this time. We aim to rectify any underlying issues causing damp and mould as soon as is practically possible, and will be implementing an automatic review process to check that any remedial works have resolved the problem.

Consideration is given to the makeup of the household, along with any vulnerabilities or health issues that might be exacerbated or caused by the damp and mould issue as the priority for work to be undertaken will reflect the individual circumstances surrounding each case.

The tenant is kept informed throughout the process of identifying and resolving any issues, as is the case for all repairs. Where condensation is the cause of the damp or mould, we will provide a useful information leaflet and access to a video, both in various languages and large print where required for tenants to explain ways in which they can minimise the risk of future mould developing. We will also ensure that we are providing adequate mechanical ventilation in kitchens and bathrooms, and appropriate ventilation in all other rooms.

All damp and mould cases will be separately identified on our Housing Management System to ensure we have clear logging and reporting of damp and mould cases and to also ensure we can then automatically add a follow-on visit to the affected property within a set time-scale, dependant on the severity of the issue reported.

Our tenant-facing housing staff will also be trained in identifying damp and mould issues and also in ways to minimise condensation so that they can help our tenants but also flag up any issues to our repairs team for action.