Damp and mould Policy

Policy aims

This policy outlines the City Council's approach to managing damp and mould. It has been written in response to the Regulator of Social Housing and to comply with the government's proposed Awaab's Law. The policy sets out how we will manage our response to damp and mould and the service levels that tenants can expect to receive.

The policy recognises the priority the City Council is now giving to what has become a much wider and higher profile agenda.

This policy will ensure the council complies with the Housing Act 2004, which states that properties must be free from hazards at the most dangerous 'category 1' level, as assessed using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), a risk-based evaluation tool. This includes mould and all types of dampness.

The policy will also support the council to meet the Decent Homes Standard, which states that social housing must be free from dangerous 'category 1' hazards. The Decent Homes Standard also states that social housing must be in a reasonable state of repair and provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort. Where the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) determines a provider has breached standards, it has a range of legal powers it can use, including enforcement powers.

Our Commitments

All Westminster City Council (WCC) residents should live in a safe, warm and secure home that is well maintained. Residents should be kept at the centre of everything we do and be treated with empathy and respect by all staff. This must be a core value in the way the repairs service is delivered.

Effective delivery

We are committed to:

- Prioritising the removal of damp and mould
- Planning improvements in data and new KPI's
- New Equality impact assessments
- Improving communication, both internally and with our residents
- Improvements in staff training

We recognise that many of our tenants experience damp and mould. There are lots of factors that cause damp, condensation and mould and they are often difficult to manage. The government guidance on the health risks of damp and mould for landlords makes clear it is the responsibility of landlords to identify and address underlying causes of damp and mould, such as structural issues or inadequate ventilation, and we will tackle every case and every problem by pro-actively adopting a 'zero tolerance' approach to damp and mould and targeting an urgent resolution where it is found.

We will:

- ensure that we comply with the time limits proposed in Awaab's Law.
- respond sensitively and assess the issue with urgency to identify the severity of the damp and mould and potential risks to tenants.
- always tackle the underlying issue promptly, and act with urgency when concerns have been raised about tenant health.
- ensure tenants are informed about the steps that will be taken to remove mould and address any underlying issues and the timeframes for the work.
- photograph and document the location of the mould before it is removed in order to help identify the source.
- remove the mould, to address the health risk to tenants.
- identify and tackle the underlying causes of damp and mould, including building deficiencies, inadequate ventilation and condensation.
- where requested we will undertake an inspection to ensure that the treatment has been effective, or if damp and mould have reappeared, undertake further investigation and intervention.
- prioritise resources to tackle damp issues. This will be a priority for all of our housing teams, and surveyors. Reports of damp and mould will be managed by our specialist damp and mould team.
- start by acknowledging that damp and mould are not the fault of any household.
- communicate with residents in a timely and sympathetic way. We will follow up on every case and every visit. We will proactively ask if a member of the household is vulnerable or at increased risk including babies, those with health and respiratory conditions, those with disabilities. Such residents will be prioritised in accordance with the recommendations made for Awaab's Law.
- arrange a visit to diagnose and book any treatment within three days of a report of damp and mould. The case will be dealt with within 20 days or sooner if it is an emergency.
- have a rapid-response mould removal and treatment team. They will be allocated to cases within these target times to remove mould ahead of any longer-term preventative or remedial work. We will post inspect all damp and mould cases and photograph the impact.
- agree an action plan with residents to ensure we resolve specific issue(s).
- allocate a dedicated surveyor to case manage the treatment where persistent damp occurs. They will be a dedicated point of contact and. arrange the necessary work and ensure communications are maintained until the work is completed. We will refer vulnerable residents to Adult and Children's Services who are identified as needing additional support while the damp/mould is addressed and with their agreement.
- appoint a dedicated surveyor to give advice and tips on how to minimise condensation. They will signpost residents to advice and support with energy bills. We are also investing in our void properties to make sure they are best placed to avoid issues of damp and mould. We will integrate more proactive strategies to assist ongoing prevention including regular maintenance checks and, where appropriate, we will invest in improved ventilation systems.
- invest in technology, such as humidity sensors to help with early detection of damp and mould.

- review the policy regularly with residents and monitor the effectiveness of the policy and the commitments it makes. We will ensure that performance is monitored against detailed Key Performance Indicators and we will report regularly on performance against these targets, and provide our Resident Panel with monthly performance information. We will also invite the Resident Panel and other resident groups to feedback on the policy at regular intervals and to work with us to ensure that the policy underpins continual improvement.
- recognise that there are many factors that can cause condensation. We will offer practical advice to residents to help tackle damp and mould and will ensure details of how we can support residents experiencing or concerned with damp and mould are published online.
- advise any resident who is concerned about the symptoms they are experiencing to consult a healthcare professional.

Tenants with Vulnerabilities

Some residents, including young children and people with particular health conditions, such as respiratory issues or immune deficiencies, and those with disabilities, are potentially more vulnerable and at greater risk because of damp and mould. When damp and mould issues are reported we will ask residents if they or household members have any health needs or disabilities requiring their repairs to be prioritised.

All council staff visiting homes, including those from Children's and Adults Social Care, will be asked to look for mould and report back any issues to Housing making clear if tenants have vulnerabilities, disabilities and health conditions.

Identification and Training

All staff who visit tenants in their homes will actively look for signs of damp and mould and report any that they find. We have also set up a specialist damp and mould team and will ensure messaging on damp and mould is regularly reinforced with our general surveying staff.

We will provide training for non-repairs staff to help them to identify damp and mould. Other Council staff visiting homes including Children's and Adults will also be trained to ask and look for mould and report back to Housing.

We will support residents by introducing awareness programmes and publicising advice on how to prevent damp and mould from occurring and how to easily and quickly identify cases where they do occur. All communications and services related to the policy will be made accessible to all residents.

Managing Cases

In terms of our approach to damp and mould we will follow these guiding principles:

- We will always aim to remove the immediate risk through a damp and mould wash. This will ensure that the threat to the health of residents is reduced. If the risk cannot be removed immediately because of required remedial works, we will look to move residents temporarily until the risk has been resolved. Issues around vulnerabilities will be part of the decision making.
- Mould washes will be undertaken in all cases, and dehumidifiers provided with guidance and advice on how to use and reduce damp and mould.
- Repairs will be completed in line with Westminster's repairs standards. All cases will be kept under review until formally closed.
- In all cases any issues around vulnerabilities will be flagged and recorded. An appropriate response in such cases could include temporary decanting.

Resources and Approach

Incidences of damp and mould will be managed by dedicated and specialist team. They will deliver the service within the following operating framework:

- Attending free home visits
- Washing and cleaning any affected surfaces with a fungicidal wash.
- Solving the root cause of the problem. This may involve further investigation and we recognise that there may be multiple causes.
- We will treat each case individually, recognising that every case is different.

Diagnosis and Action

Cases will be diagnosed and actioned within the following timelines, and in accordance with Awaab's Law:

- A triage inspection of the property will be made within three days to assess the presence of damp and mould, their severity, location, underlying causes and potential health risks.
- Assessment of damp and mould will always be carried out by appropriately qualified staff or contractors.
- We will undertake a damp and mould wash within 10 days.
- A follow up inspection will be undertaken to check there has been no return of damp and mould within three months.
- Any follow up works will be completed within three months.
- We will always leave guidance explaining the cause and impact of damp and mould and setting out what residents need to do if any signs return.

Monitoring

To ensure the policy is being rigorously implemented we will monitor performance against the following indicators:

- Number of cases reported and identified.
- Number of cases visited and assessed.
- Number of cases where all identified remedial works have been completed.

The aim of the monitoring framework is to:

- Increase resident satisfaction around the management of damp and mould.
- Reduce ad hoc repairs relating to damp and mould.
- Reduce recall visits for damp and mould.
- Reduce complaints linked to damp and mould.
- Reduce disrepair cases linked to damp and mould.

As part of this policy, we are keen to understand any inequalities linked to access, experience and/or support and we will introduce processes to identify such issues.

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