



EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY: 23 February 2023

LANDLORD SERVICES: 1 March 2023

CABINET: 7 March 2023

Report of: Corporate Director of Transformation, Housing and Resources

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor N Pryce-Roberts

Contact for further information: Alan Leicester (alan.leicester@westlancs.gov.uk)

SUBJECT: Update on Actions – Damp and Mould Management in Council Housing

Wards Affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update about the work that is being completed to mitigate the issue with damp and mould in council homes.
- 1.2 For members to note the contents of the report and the action being taken.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

- 2.1 That the Committee consider the report and that the action and information is noted and agreed comments of the Executive Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be passed to Cabinet for their consideration

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

- 3.1 That Cabinet note the action already taken and the future proposed action to mitigate damp and mould issues in council homes and the aims to reduce the impact on the health to our tenants.
- 3.2 That Cabinet endorse the actions being taken.

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Members will be aware of the tragic incident with regards to the death of a young child in a Rochdale Borough Housing property. The findings of the coroner directly attributed the condition of the property to the death of the child.
- 4.2 Following the findings the Regulator requested information from housing providers with regards to the action being taken by providers to ensure the safety of residents in relation to damp, mould, and condensation. WLBC provided feedback within the required timescale.
- 4.3 In addition to the requirements of the Regulator, the Housing Ombudsman issued direction and recommendations in the way complaints, disrepair claims, and reports of damp and mould should be treated and managed in light of the Rochdale case.
- 4.3 Housing Services have reviewed communication from the Regulator and Ombudsman and identified some additional actions in addition to the work already undertaken to manage damp, mould & condensation within our housing stock.
- 4.4 WLBC take seriously any reports of damp, mould, or condensation raising any repairs or conducting inspections to identify necessary remedies as required.

5.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 5.1 A working group has been put in place involving officers from across the teams in Housing Services and they have developed a working action plan and a work tracker. The group meets weekly to progress the agreed actions within the plan.
- 5.2 Savills have been conducting a stock condition survey for us and this puts us in a good position as they have completed 4,839 surveys. During those surveys, they have identified any issues relating to Housing health and safety rating system (HHSRS) and for damp have recorded those issues as severe, moderate, or slight. The survey identified 3 severe, 169 moderate and 620 slight issues. The regulator required feedback detailing any cases that fall into a Category 1 or Category 2 HHSRS. This means for WLBC we had 3 cases that fell into Category 1 and 789 in Category 2.
- 5.2 The actions delivered so far are:
 - a) Wates have instructed their operatives when in our homes to report back any identified issues so an appropriate inspection can be arranged.
 - b) Visited all 3 properties identified with a severe issue, conducted a fungicidal wash of the affected areas, identified additional work required which has been ordered and appointments agreed with the tenants.
 - c) We have brought in additional resources to support our action plan and future actions to resolve current and future cases: These resources are:

- An additional surveyor for an initial 6 months who specialises in disrepair.
 - Introduced an additional administration resource for 6 months to contact tenants and decide on work to be completed or to agree an appointment with a surveyor for an inspection.
 - Recruited 2 additional caretakers for 3 months to directly conduct and target initial fungicidal washes to the 620 properties identified with slight issues. The caretakers will also report any additional issues identified.
 - Recommendation for February Council HRA budget report to include £500k for 23/4 & £250k for £24/5 to support our response to addressing damp, mould, and condensation in customers' homes. These funds will be used to complete any additional repairs, support the running of any pilot systems and if required to support additional resources to ensure an effective response.
- d) We have provided briefing documents to all customer facing colleagues to look out for and report any issues of damp or mould.
 - e) Created a dynamic action plan that is reviewed at each core group meeting.
 - f) Reviewed applications for rehousing from customers who have mentioned damp or mould in their application and for those applicants who are existing tenants we are in the process of conducting home visits.
 - g) Our customer services team are reporting any issues where a customer has mentioned mould or damp, our commitment is to conduct an inspection within 7 working days of the report.
 - h) Introduced a new Customer Feedback Policy in line with the Housing Ombudsman's guidelines to ensure effective management of issues raised by customers. This has been accompanied by a detailed training package to all relevant staff.

5.3 Further actions which are in progress include:

- a) Wates are currently reviewing their Palm Top Devices so a specific action will be required by operatives to confirm if they have identified any issues in a property during completing a repair or not.
- b) We are currently investigating the potential use of technology to monitor and measure such as CO2, moisture, or heating in properties to proactively identify potential issues. We will be aiming to run a pilot scheme in Q1 of 2023/4.
- c) We have reviewed our website and are enhancing the information and advice for customers.
- d) Conducting desktop and property inspections as appropriate for the 169 cases identified as moderate and ordering any required follow up work.
- e) We have identified those properties where Savills have been unable to get access as part of the full stock condition survey and in February 23, we will be writing to those tenants to try and arrange an appointment for Savills to conduct the inspection.
- f) We are developing a training course for colleagues on this matter which would be relevant to their current role.

- g) In February 23 we start writing to or contacting all our tenants asking them to report any issues of damp, mould, or condensation. We will be writing to tenants in batches as this will ensure we are able to manage the response effectively.
- h) Any communication that we send to customers will refer to where customers can obtain support specifically relevant to financial inclusion.

5.4 At each core group meeting we discuss any further actions or current best practice that we may be able to implement and further develop and build this into actions to be completed or considered.

7.0 STATUTORY REQUIREMENT

7.1 We are required in line with legislation that homes are fit for human habitation and are free from any HHSRS.

7.2 We are also required to deal with any complaints raised as per the Housing Ombudsman requirements

7.3 We are required to meet the standards and recommendations of the regulator in terms of understanding the current position and having systems in place to deal with reports of damp and mould

8.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Failure to ensure our properties are maintained will mean they will require longer term investment if they have been impacted by such as damp and mould.

9.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The financial impacts are not yet fully known as additional work or actions will continue to be identified as inspections etc are completed.

9.2 As outlined in this report additional resources are proposed as part of the budget setting process.

10.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

10.1 The risks for not dealing with these issues as they are raised are:

- a) The ombudsman may find against us for maladministration and subsequently issue an order for compensation if issues are not effectively managed.
- b) If we are found failing by the ombudsman this could be a reputational risk to the organisation and could force an inspection from the regulator and issue of a regulatory notice.
- c) If a disrepair case is taken to its fullest extent the costs could be significant to the organisation with some awards for other organisations being high

along with the requirement to pay all legal figures which in many cases are more than compensation ordered by the courts.

11.0 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Our proactive approach will ensure the effective management of damp, mould or condensation will ensure that we are providing healthy homes and supporting the long-term health and wellbeing of our customers.

Background Documents

There are no background documents

Equality Impact Assessment

There is a direct impact on our customers, colleagues. Therefore, an Equality Impact Assessment is required. A formal Equality Impact Assessment is attached as an Appendix A to this report.

Appendices

Appendix A - Equality Impact Assessment