



West Lancashire Borough Council

**Damp and Mould Policy
January 2024**

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Service Area	Property Services
Group / Persons consulted	Landlord Services Committee Your Voice Tenants' Group
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Contents

Section	Content	Page
1	Introduction	3
2	Purpose	3
3	Scope	4
4	Definitions	4
5	Statement of Intent/Policy	4
6	Training	7
7	Monitoring	7
8	Escalating Issues and Customer Feedback Policy	8
9	Review	9
10	Legal Framework	9
11	Policy Review	9
12	Version Control	9

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 As a landlord, West Lancashire Borough Council (WLBC) is responsible for the maintenance and repairs of our homes, communal blocks, and other properties we own and manage. Making sure our tenants can live safely and comfortably in their homes and delivering high quality housing services is a key priority.
- 1.2 This policy and our operational processes complement the Council's Damp, Mould and Condensation strategy. It outlines to all our tenants, officers, employees, partners, elected members and residents, how we intend to meet our legal and regulatory damp and mould obligations. It ensures we have a proactive, prompt and supportive approach to damp, mould and condensation interventions, which minimises risk to our tenants and the integrity of their homes.
- 1.3 In October 2021, the Housing Ombudsman issued a report 'Spotlight on Damp and Mould', highlighting the approach they expect to see landlords take when dealing with tenants who report or complain about damp and mould. This report outlined recommendations that landlords should review as part of their management of damp and mould issues within their tenants' homes and the aim of this policy is to reflect these recommendations.
- 1.4 In September 2023 the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities issued guidance "Damp and Mould – Understanding and addressing the health risks for rented housing providers". This policy has been developed taking in to account the recommendations within the guidance.
- 1.5 The Ombudsman and Regulator have identified the impact that damp and mould can have on the respiratory, physical, and mental health of individuals and it is important that we deal with issues of damp quickly and effectively to minimise any impact on health and wellbeing.
- 1.6 The 5 main legal standards that relate to damp and mould in rented homes are:
 - Housing Act 2004 – 'All homes must be free from hazards at the most dangerous category 1 level'.
 - Environmental Protection Act 1990 – 'All homes must not contain conditions that are prejudicial to health'.
 - Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 – 'Homes must be fit to live in'.
 - Decent Homes Standard – 'Social Housing specifically must meet the decent homes standard'.
 - Energy Efficiency Regulations 2015 – 'Privately rented homes must meet the minimum energy efficiency standards'.

2.0 Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of this policy is to:
 - make it clear how we enable and support our strategic aims.
 - set out the timescales and key performance standards to manage damp, mould, and condensation.

- make clear our approach for dealing with damp, mould and condensation across our housing stock.
- take a zero-tolerance and pro-active approach to damp and mould interventions, ensuring that it is easy for our tenants to report issues to us.
- work with tenants to ensure that they live in a safe environment and are treated in a fair and consistent way, with respect and dignity.

3.0 Scope

- 3.1 This policy relates to the council's approach towards the prevention and management of damp, mould, and condensation in the social housing that it owns and manages.

4.0 Definitions

- 4.1 'Damp' in this context can be defined simply as the presence of moisture within a home that can cause a detrimental effect to the building or its occupants. Dampness is a symptom and identifying its cause and source should be an holistic approach. The main types of Damp are often identified as

- **Rising Damp** – movement of moisture from the ground rising through the structure of the building through capillary action.
- **Penetrating Damp** – water penetrating the exterior of a structure or internal leaks causing damage to the internal surfaces or structure.
- **Condensing Damp** – moisture held in warm air encountering cold surfaces, subsequently condensing, and causing water droplets.
- **Mould** is a natural organic compound that develops in damp conditions and will normally only grow on damp surfaces.

5.0 Statement of Intent/Policy

5.1 *Preventative and proactive approach*

To help to prevent and ensure we have a proactive approach for dealing with damp, mould, and condensation we will:

- offer a wide range of information, advice remedies and support to our tenants.
- work with tenants to help them understand what small changes they can make to reduce the risk of damp and mould in their homes.
- have annual campaigns on social media, and on our website and push positive advice messages.
- investigate to determine the cause of damp using a holistic process.
- carry out required remedial works in a timely manner.
- offer advice and guidance where appropriate and take all reasonable steps to eradicate damp including managing and controlling condensation via reasonable ventilation and insulation improvements to our homes.
- refresh and update our communication channels each year or sooner as required.
- provide a range of information to assist tenants to understand the causes, resulting issues and practical remedies that are available for prevention. This will be available both on our dedicated web pages and to individual residents where damp, mould and condensation issues have affected their home.

- refer those who are suffering fuel poverty to our Money Advice team to provide support on energy charges, advice on fuel efficiency and any grants or funding that may assist with heating, fuel payments and fuel efficiency.
- ensure that at the commencement of and during a tenancy, there is clear information on our role as a landlord, remedies and available solutions and timescales for resolving.
- provide all new tenants with information as to how they can access a detailed handbook regarding repairs to their homes.
- require all contractors who visit homes to carry out work on our behalf, to report damp and mould issues as a duty of care.
- train officers to identify and report any damp and mould issues as part of the annual tenancy visit/review, transfer visit or mutual exchange.
- identify trends and lessons learned through complaints and amend our processes appropriately.
- utilise all tools and legal remedies to access our properties or private properties impacting on ours, to ensure all necessary work is completed in a timely manner.

5.2 Prevention through Planned Investment programmes

It is important to utilise effective planned maintenance programmes to prevent damp and mould and to achieve this we will:

- ensure that data gathered from our stock condition surveys and from the day-to-day repairs and empty homes re-instatement, are fed into future investment plans.
- identify wider issues relating to damp across property types as part of any inspection carried out by officers. This information will then be fed back to the Investment Manager for consideration for future investment plans.
- prioritise works within the asset management strategy where decent homes data indicates construction issues that contribute to, or cause damp.
- identify damp, mould, and condensation as part of our rolling stock condition surveys. This will profile risk properties and areas and identify future priority programs of work as well as higher risk homes.
- have a planned approach to regularly inspecting and maintaining any ventilation systems installed in our homes.

5.3 Identifying issues and dealing with reports.

When damp or mould is reported to us or is identified by an employee or representative of the Council, it is important that we act to deal with the issues as quickly as possible while supporting the tenant throughout the process.

Therefore, we will:

- respond sensitively and keep tenants informed through regular contact at all stages of the process when we are dealing with any issues of damp, mould, or condensation.
- record and take photographs of any damp or mould before removal, to help us to identify causes and monitor to see if the damp or mould returns.
- ensure each report of damp, mould and condensation is reviewed on a case-by-case basis in an empathetic and supportive way taking full account of any vulnerabilities our tenants may have.

- review any work requests or work carried out to ensure that if the issues are repeated, we can quickly understand where alternative remedies need to be investigated through re-inspection and if necessary, referral to a specialist surveyor.
- ensure each tenant experiencing issues with damp, mould or condensation has access to information that is easy to understand.
- arrange an initial inspection visit to the customer's home.
- consider the results of any corresponding surveys and investigations to help inform decisions on whether remedial work is required and whether there is any action that tenants can also take that may help to resolve and prevent re-occurrence of issues in the future.
- agree any proposed remedial works with tenants before they begin.
- inform tenants of the expected start and finish time of any remedial works and if we need to make provision to relocate before the works begin, we will follow our Decant Policy.
- monitor all cases where we have provided a remedy and agree with tenants how we will monitor and for how long.
- Once remedial works are complete, us, or our contractor will check with tenants that they are satisfied with the outcome, and may carry out a post inspection. We will advise tenants what they can do if they are dissatisfied with the agreed remedy or outcome.
- aim to complete an initial identification visit by an officer from our Property Services team within 7 working days of damp and / or mould being reported.
- identify and agree a remedy, with the aim of then completing corresponding works within 14 days. This is to match our overall aim of identifying and remedying issues within 21 working days of notification wherever possible. Where this timeframe is not achievable, us or our contractor will communicate this clearly to the tenant and explain the reasons why this timeframe will be extended. Determining the overall timeframe for inspection and corresponding works will be subject to availability of materials and labour, access being provided by the tenant and any other factors beyond the Council's control.
- ensure that at the initial inspection, our trained Officers will identify where a wider, in depth or specialist inspection is required. They will ensure that as part of the inspection process, they record and refer to a specialist surveyor or contractor.
- if required, extend investigations into the causes of the damp and mould in to neighbouring properties to ensure the root causes are identified and dealt with.
- ensure each report is treated on an individual basis and recorded.
- prioritise work and inspections where it is identified or reported that a tenant or the family is vulnerable due to age, health, disability, or other issues (see vulnerabilities in appendix b). In these circumstances, we will aim to inspect within 3 working days and seek to remedy within 10 working days subject to the nature of the issues and / or the type of remedial works required. As above, where this timeframe is not achievable, we will communicate this clearly to the tenant and explain the reasons why this timeframe will be extended. Again, determining the overall timeframe for inspection and corresponding works will also be subject to availability of materials, labour, access being provided by the tenant and any other factors beyond the Council's control.

5.4 Actions and Resolution

To ensure the safety of our tenants and ensure their health and wellbeing is not impacted, we will act as swiftly as possible to resolve any issues of damp and mould. To achieve this, we will:

- aim to complete a mould wash within 5 working days where damp, mould and condensation issues are identified on our initial inspection, before agreeing and programming any required further remedial work.
- where appropriate, install technology to monitor the property for signs of damp and mould reoccurring.
- arrange a decant where it is agreed that the proposed solutions are not a suitable approach or where we are unable to repair the property in a reasonable timeframe.

In cases where we cannot agree the scope of any remedial works, we have proposed, or in cases where the initial diagnosis identifies a complex case, or where a solution we have agreed is not working, we will identify a suitably qualified surveyor or contractor to be appointed. We will then act on any survey recommendations in line with our anticipated timescales where possible, dependent on the recommendations.

6.0 Training

- 6.1 We will deliver mandatory training to our staff on this policy and the procedures that support it, including team briefings and basic damp and mould awareness training. We will provide on the job training for those delivering housing management, financial inclusion services and planned maintenance and repair works as part of their daily job.
- 6.2 All our officers who carry out home visits will have basic training on the causes and impact of damp, mould and condensation and the effects and remedies and will be trained to raise issues with the Surveyors. This training will include an outline as to the health risks to individuals due to the presence of damp and mould.
- 6.3 We will ensure that all officers understand that some tenants may be at greater risk of health harm due to damp and mould, depending on any specific medical conditions or vulnerabilities.
- 6.4 Our property surveyors will have in depth training and will refer cases on to the dedicated damp team where the situation is complex.

7.0 MONITORING AND PERFORMANCE

- 7.1 We will carry out monitoring of all reported cases of damp, mould and condensation and ensure all cases are dealt with effectively.
- 7.2 Where we have treated with mould wash, if appropriate we will aim to carry out a return inspection to the property within the first 6 months and then where necessary, arrange re-visits on a regular basis to ensure the issues do not reoccur.

- 7.3 Where damp works are required officers will aim to make contact with tenants 6 weeks after the work has been completed. This timescale may vary dependent upon the type of repair as some repairs may require a longer period of time to be left to ensure that they have been effective.
- 7.4 We will conduct a more frequent stock condition survey on our homes where we have carried out major repairs/works because of damp and mould.
- 7.5 We will monitor data to improve our understanding and learning in relation to the occurrence of damp, mould and condensation taking account of:
- structural factors including property age, design, insulation, thermal efficiency, and any modifications.
 - occupancy levels and overcrowding.
 - the availability and use of heating and ventilation systems.
 - individual circumstances such as disability, financial hardship, and health conditions.
- 7.6 We will collect and monitor the following information.
- Number of cases reported and by whom.
 - Number of active cases as a percentage of total properties.
 - Number of concluded cases.
 - Average time to carry out a survey following reporting, against the Key Performance (KPI) Indicator target.
 - Average time to carry out remedial works, against the KPI target.
- 7.7 We will collect and provide monthly and annual monitoring and performance data as required to meet statutory and regulatory requirements. This will be to monitor our service delivery and to provide openness and transparency to our tenants, residents, senior officers, and elected members.
- 7.8 We will ensure that our tenants have access to our performance data every quarter through our Customer Voice and engagement forums.
- 7.9 Ourselves or our contractor will ask for customer feedback at the point of closing a case and will use this to shape services and improve.

8.0 Escalating Issues and Customer Feedback Policy

- 8.1 Customers may telephone our customer service centre and ask to speak to a member of the damp team if they have any concerns as this will allow us to resolve any issues in a timely fashion.
- 8.2 We are committed to consistently providing an excellent service to all our tenants. We value all feedback about our service and the service of our contractors in rectifying issues of damp and mould. We recognise that occasionally things can go wrong. In these circumstances, we want to make it as quick and simple as possible for our tenants to raise their concerns, so that we can resolve the issues in a timely way.
- 8.3 Our [Customer Feedback policy](#) sets out how we handle feedback, which includes Comments, Compliments and Complaints.

9.0 REVIEW

91 Our approach to managing damp and mould will be supported by operational amendments to our process, based on findings and feedback from our customers, along with learning across the sector.

9.2 We will ask tenants for their feedback on any work, support, and advice we provide on damp, mould, and condensation as part of delivering our tenant engagement activity.

9.3 In addition to the work of our internal auditors, we will also recruit a team of specialist auditors every 2 years to review the policy, process, and strategy to ensure a higher level of assurance.

10.0 Legal framework

10.1 The following is a list of legislation that is applicable to this policy.

- Defective Premises Act 1972 (s4)
- Occupiers Liability Act 1957
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, Section 11
- Environmental Protection Act 1990 (s79 Statutory Notice)
- Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002
- Housing Act 2004 which introduced the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).
- Equality Act 2010
- Building Regulations 2013
- Approved Document C (Site preparation and resistance to contaminants and moisture)
- Homes(Fit for Human Habitation) Act 2018.
- The Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards

11.0 Policy Review

11.1 This policy will be reviewed in quarter one of 2025 or when a change in Legislation is received.

12.0 Version Control

Date	Amendment	Version