

Damp, Condensation and Mould Policy

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to set out the Council's approach to addressing the risks of damp, condensation or mould (DCM) within our properties and communal areas and how we will respond to reports of DCM from our tenants, staff, agencies or by any other means.

We will:

- Manage our homes and train our staff to ensure that we proactively identify and react to instances of damp, condensation or mould. We have procured a specialist contractors service to assist with surveys and repairs.
- Risk assess our assets and the potential impact of works on our customers, especially where vulnerabilities are present. See risk assessment sheet at appendix A.
- Respond, inspect and report on all cases of DCM brought to our attention and use intelligence to identify property types at risk.
- Treat tenants reporting DCM with empathy and respect, without any prejudgement and communicate with tenants clearly and regularly regarding any actions we plan to take and any actions our tenants are advised to take.
- Undertake effective investigations by suitably qualified contractors and implement all reasonable remedial repair solutions and improvements to eradicate damp and mould, including controlling condensation
- Ensure that customers have access to and/or are provided with comprehensive support, advice and guidance on managing and controlling DCM and reduce the risk of it re-occurring
- Be supportive and responsive to customer vulnerabilities to ensure all customer needs are considered, addressed and solutions are agreed with customers
- Comply with statutory requirements and good practice relating to DCM
- To protect the fabric of the property from deterioration and damage resulting from DCM

Our staff and contractors will work together with our tenants to deliver this policy.

Legal and Legislation Requirements

The policy is aligned with the Consumer Standards proposed by the Regulator of Social Housing, specifically: - Safety and Quality Standard, registered providers shall: ensure that customers' homes meet the standard set out in section five of the Governments Decent Homes Guidance and continue to maintain their homes to at least this standard.

The policy is also aligned to the follow legislation:

Housing Act 2004 Part 1 – Housing Condition

Housing Act 2004 - Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

Decent Homes Standard

The Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018

Policy Scope

This policy explains how we will respond, inspect and report on DCM, including but not limited to:

Who the policy applies to:

- Tenants who rent their home under a tenancy agreement.
- Customers in alternative tenure where SHDC has a repairing obligation.
- All property communal areas.
- Emergency or temporary accommodation.

How we will work with our tenants, staff and contractors to manage and eradicate DCM. This includes:

- Proactively identifying property types at highest risk of DCM so that we can undertake proactive measures to eliminate DCM before it becomes a problem for our customers.
- Interrogating data and reports of DCM to understand trends and investigate those similar property types where no reports have been received.
- Risk assessing the tenants vulnerabilities and needs, implementing reasonable adjustments within our process to support them
- Risk assessing the severity of the DCM along with the tenant vulnerabilities to identify acceptable reaction times.
- Identifying the types of DCM and remedies to eradicate these.
- Delivering clear lines of communication and plans to tenants to remedy any issues
- Follow up each completed DCM repair work being carried out within six months completion to check there are no issues.

Definitions of Damp, Condensation and Mould

Rising Damp

The movement of moisture from the ground rising through the structure of the building through capillary action.

Penetrating Damp (including internal leaks)

Water penetrating the external structure of the building or internal leaks causing damp, rot and damage to internal surfaces and structure.

Condensation Damp

Condensation occurs when moisture held in warm air comes into contact with a cold surface and then condenses producing water droplets.

The conditions that may increase the risk of condensation are:

- Lack of ventilation within the property
- Inadequate heating or draught proofing
- Inadequate loft insulation.
- High humidity
- Overcrowding
- Poor building design construction, cold areas (bridging) which are integral with the building construction.
- Moisture from the construction stage in new build properties.

Mould

Is a natural organic compound that develops in damp conditions and will only grow on damp surfaces. It is often noticeable and present in situations where condensation damp is present.

Scale and Scope of DCM

All homes are affected by condensation at some point, however certain activities can increase the problem and good practices can eliminate this from becoming a bigger problem.

It is also important to recognise that DCM presents different risks to different customers, with more severe cases of damp and mould especially in living areas presenting more of a risk.

Minor instances of mould, such as around window frames and in silicone is a lower risk than mould appearing on ceilings, walls and soft furnishings.

To respond appropriately and effectively with all reports the severity of the DCM needs to be established, as quickly as possible. This is done using the risk assessment tool at appendix A which includes detailing any vulnerabilities of the occupants of the household.

Vulnerability Factors – Centre for Disease Control and Prevention

Those who are most vulnerable to the effects of instances of DCM are those:

- Who suffer or are susceptible to allergies.
- With immune suppression diseases – (eg cancer, HIV)
- With underlying lung disease
- With chronic respiratory disease – (e.g. COPD, Asbestosis)
- With asthma
- Young children – under the age of 5
- Older people – over the age of 70
- Pregnant women

Those who may need additional help and support when experiencing DCM are those:

- Who are living with mental illness conditions, especially autism, asperger's, dementia, psychosis.
- Older people who are not able to respond to some of the recommendations.
- Those with disabilities such as sight impairments or physical disabilities that could restrict any cleaning required.

Response

The Council initially assesses DCM under the following categories: **Emergency, Urgent** and **Routine**, and requires a specific response for each. All reports of damp and mould will be assessed using our risk assessment tool and categorised into response time frames within 2 working days of any DCM report being made.

If the risk assessment tool indicates an emergency response is required a physical inspection will be carried out within 24 hours to establish the extent of the DCM.

<p>Emergency 4</p>	<p>Response: Emergency visit for physical inspection within 24 hours to follow up initial telephone triage. Remedial actions to be agreed including timescales with the tenant. An assessment for alternative accommodation will be carried out and agreed with the tenant if deemed necessary.</p> <p>Description: Extensive damp and mould in multiple living areas, highly vulnerable residents, very young or elderly with chronic health and/or vulnerability factors.</p>
<p>Urgent 3</p>	<p>Response: Urgent response for physical inspection within three working days.</p> <p>Description: multiple areas of extensive damp and/or mould growth in main living areas of bedrooms, living rooms, bathroom mould growth, and/or dampness highly visible on surfaces, levels of vulnerability present, young or elderly residents with known vulnerabilities that exacerbate risk.</p>
<p>Routine 2</p>	<p>Response: Routine response for physical inspection within five working days.</p> <p>Description: multiple areas of damp isolated by area and location (e.g., under stair cupboard i.e., non-habitable space.) Customer risk factor such as very young or elderly with no specific vulnerabilities may exist.</p>
<p>Monitor 1</p>	<p>Response: Property Services Team to monitor and maintain contact until such time that it is mutually agreed for the case to be closed. There must be a reason given for ALL closures.</p> <p>Description: All cases where initial remedial actions are considered complete. No case will be closed without a valid reason for the closure being given.</p>

Works Assigned to Contractors.

Inspections

Where surveys are assigned to a contractor, the Property Services team will ensure that physical inspections are carried out within the contracted timescales.

Reports

All reports are to be returned by the contractor to the Property Services team within 3 working days of the appointment date.

Remedials

All remedial works assigned to a contractor will be monitored by the Property Services team.

Completion of repairs (KPI)

Repairs for all works required would be to be completed within 56 days of the works being authorised except for extensive repairs where the works will be agreed.

Monitoring Our Performance

All reports of damp and mould will be logged at an individual property level.

Each month the Housing Property Services manager will report to the Housing Landlord Board on:

- The number of reports received.
- The number of cases by classification
- The number of physical inspections carried out.
- The number of remedial actions raised.
- The number of cases where advice was given.
- The number of cases where closure was agreed with the tenant.

Each quarter the Housing Property Services Manager will report to the Housing Landlord Board on:

- The number of physical inspections assigned to a Contractor.
- The number of remedial actions assigned to a Contractor.
- Contractor KPI's including any exceptions.
- Council KPI's including any exceptions.
- The number of property types under investigation
- Level of satisfaction with the service at case closure
- Outcomes by exception e.g. number of decants in the quarter

Communications Strategy

We will maintain contact with tenants with an open case at agreed intervals. We will also work with other council departments and agencies to ensure that the tenant is kept safe and informed during any works that need to take place:

- If it is unsafe for the occupants to remain in the property while the works are carried out, alternative accommodation arrangements will be made. This may be on a day-by-day basis or a temporary decant to an alternative property. The customer will be supported through this process to find suitable accommodation.
- In some cases it may be necessary to re-house a family on a permanent basis if a medical professional advises that re-housing is the most suitable option. This will be considered in accordance with SHDC Allocations Policy and local arrangements.
- Where a tenant has been assessed as having vulnerability factors that could affect how they react to damp and mould the Property Services team will work with the tenant to ensure that the tenant gets all the help and support required to eradicate the DCM.

From time to time the council may invite tenants to scrutinise performance of this policy.

No Access Issues

Where DCM has been identified either by a tenant or by SHDC or a property has been assessed as high risk through SHDC data insight, tenants will be required to allow access for inspections and for the carrying out of remedial works (in accordance with their tenancy agreement).

SHDC do consider this to be a health and safety concern for tenants and will consider alternative methods of gaining access, such as seeking an injunction.

All properties identified as hard to access or refusal of access will be managed through SHDC standard “hard to access” process.

Tenants Responsibilities

It is the tenant’s responsibility to immediately report any evidence of rising and penetrating damp (see definitions on page 2 of this document) and faulty equipment that will affect the management of humidity and moisture in the home (faulty extractor fan, unable to open windows, heating system failure etc).

Where specialist equipment has been installed by SHDC to help control any issues with DCM, the tenants must not tamper or interfere with the equipment that will prevent it from working efficiently.

Tenants must allow access for inspections and for the carrying out of all remedial works.

Where tenants are considering making any changes within their home for example, converting rooms into one room, adding extensions, converting non-habitable buildings/spaces into habitable, they must seek advice and permission from us in accordance with their tenancy agreement to ensure that the proposed alteration would not contribute to the accumulation of DCM, as well as ensuring alterations comply with building control and planning guidelines.

Guidance to Tenants

We will offer the following advice and information to all tenants via our website, leaflets and social media to help them reduce the conditions that lead to condensation dampness:

- Keeping the presence of moisture to a minimum e.g., covering pans when cooking, drying laundry outside (where possible), where it is safe to do so, keeping the kitchen or bathroom door closed when cooking or bathing.
- Adequately heating rooms – The World Health Organisation recommends 18°C. Any tenant who is experiencing fuel poverty or debt related problems will be referred to our Cost of Living Response Officers (COLRO) to help support them with these issues
- Keeping the house well-ventilated e.g., opening windows during cooking/bathing, turning on and ensuring that the extractor fan or ventilation system installed in their home is regularly cleaned and working, keeping trickle vents in windows open and allowing air to circulate around furniture.
- Following all advice and guidance issued by us on managing humidity and moisture in the home which can lead to condensation. This information can also be found on the SHDC website.

If all reasonable efforts have been made to manage and control the presence of condensation and mould and there is still an issue then the tenant should contact SHDC immediately to report the problem.

The tenancy agreement, licenses and long leases recommends that the tenant arranges adequate household contents insurance for the home that they occupy.

Complaints

If a tenant is not satisfied by the way in which our approach to DCM has been dealt with, or in the way in which the work has been carried out, a formal complaint may be raised in line with our Complaints Policy.

Monitoring

SHDC will use a range of mechanisms to monitor and scrutinise performance, these could include the following:

- Reviewing Tenant feedback and identify areas for service improvement on a continuous basis in order to improve performance and to prioritise our work.
- We will ensure our Housing Landlord Board are provided with updates on the delivery of this policy on a quarterly basis and invite them to scrutinise performance.
- Inviting Tenants to scrutinise the performance of this policy.

Review

The Policy will be reviewed every three years and also in response to:

- Legislative Changes
- Regulatory Changes
- Government strategy or policy changes