



Contents

1. Purpose
2. Introduction and Scope
3. Definitions and key facts
4. Our commitments and responsibilities
5. Working with residents, and other assistance
6. Monitoring and reporting performance
7. Legislation and regulation
8. Equality, diversity and inclusion
9. Communication and consultation
10. Related documents

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This policy sets out Lewisham Council's approach to investigating reports of leaks, damp, mould, and diagnosing causes and recommended solutions in the residential properties we own and manage. It works alongside our Repairs policy, and supports a key priority in our Housing strategy "*improving the quality, standard and safety of housing in Lewisham*".
- 1.2 This policy is supported by processes which we will continue to review, to ensure we are doing everything that is reasonably in our power to reduce the incidence, and adverse effects, of leaks, damp, and mould in our residents' homes.

2. Introduction and Scope

- 2.1 Damp and Mould has been highlighted as a key barrier to people living healthily in their homes. Like most housing providers across the UK, we have been re-examining our approach as to how best to address damp and mould.
- 2.2 At this time, as highlighted in our housing strategy we are facing increased pressure on personal and public finances. This includes increased fuel costs, a climate emergency, and wider safety and improvement work. This means both landlords and residents are all having to carefully consider how best to use limited resources to maintain, upgrade, and heat our homes.
- 2.3 We recognise causes and effects of damp and mould are wide ranging. While a cause can sometimes be more obvious – such as tracing and fixing a leak, sometimes a problem can be complex to diagnose, treat and prevent. This may require a range of tools and techniques to resolve, or support a resident to help us keep under control.
- 2.4 Different measures will be appropriate according to the type of property, the root, and secondary causes, as well as the type of tenure – which may mean in some cases we take a more active role in resolving and sometimes our role is more advisory. So, for



example our responsibilities for work in a leasehold property differ to that in a tenanted property that we own and manage, but we may still require access to trace a problem.

3. Definitions and key facts

For the purpose of this policy and associated procedures we use the following definitions for key terms:

3.1 Damp

3.1.1 Damp – where localised, excess moisture builds up that has no means of escape.

3.1.2 While it may present itself in different ways, the root of the problem is almost always excess moisture. Damp can occur when a fault in the building's basic structure lets in water from outside. It may occasionally be rising damp, but more commonly is penetrating damp, which occurs when water is coming in through the walls or roof or through cracks. (For example, under a loose roof tile, leaking pipes, waste overflow).

3.1.3 As damp usually occurs in areas that never have chance to dry out and have little air movement, regularly ventilating a room, and even moving furnishings away from exterior walls and corners to allow air to circulate better, can help.

3.2 Condensation

3.2.1 Condensation - caused when moisture held in warm air meets a cold surface like a window or wall and condenses into water droplets.

3.2.2 Causes can include anything that releases water into the air - cooking, bathing, washing and drying clothes, sweating, and even breathing! Warm air containing moisture from these activities is held in the air until it hits something cool, like a wall or window, and because cold air holds less water than warmed air, droplets form. In the UK, condensation occurs most often in winter, because the building is colder, and windows are opened less, so moist air cannot escape.

3.2.3 As we invest in work programmes (such as insulating a property, and replacing doors and windows) to keep properties warmer, unless ventilation measures are also added and then used properly, such measures may end up contributing to moisture remaining in a building and consequently increased levels of condensation and mould. Eliminating moisture may include opening a window, keeping ventilation open and unblocked (for example trickle vents and air bricks), using a dehumidifier, and increasing air temperature by heating the property.

3.2.4 The 3 main ways to tackle condensation are therefore:

- Stop moisture building up
- Ventilate your home
- Keep your home warm

3.3 Mould

3.3.1 Mould - This is the common term used to describe the various types of fungi that thrive in moist areas.



3.3.2 It frequently appears alongside condensation on cold outside walls and surfaces and in places where the air does not circulate well. The moisture created can also damage clothes, furnishings, and decoration, and leaves a musty smell. It can aggravate health problems like asthma, bronchitis, arthritis, and rheumatism.

3.4 Water Ingress

If areas of a home are exposed to ongoing water ingress, it is likely there will be a formation of mould.

4. Our Commitments and responsibilities

- 4.1 We will treat all reports of leaks, damp, and mould seriously.
- 4.2 While we want to be consistent and fair, this does not mean we operate a 'one size fits all' approach, especially where it comes to damp and mould. We will take a solution focused, holistic approach wherever we can, which puts the resident, not just the property, at the centre of the resolution. This may involve multiple teams across our services, for example to help us consider a specific circumstance or additional risk when taking action.
- 4.3 We will ask key questions to help us determine the cause of a leak, damp, or mould issue and to help us understand the extent of any risk. We will follow this up with remedial action to solve the problem, and where we cannot immediately determine what action to take, we will follow this up with visual investigation, additional lines of enquiry, or follow up visits to help us to resolve the issue.
- 4.4 We will communicate clearly and keep residents informed of what action we will be taking, why we are taking it, and when we will do it (date or timeframe).
- 4.5 Where we are unable to take immediate action to fully resolve the issue, we will continue to communicate with the resident, and may offer an alternative interim solution or advice and support to limit the impact, until we can offer a more permanent solution. Where an issue is outside of our responsibility or control, we will try to offer straight forward and realistic advice, and deliver this with respect and empathy.
- 4.6 Residents will be given a case reference for works being carried out. Where we require specific information to be returned to us – for example a hygrometer reading, photographs, or information relating to a temporary move, we will give residents a specific point of contact.
- 4.7 This policy works alongside our compensation, reimbursements, and remedies policy, which details how and when we may compensate for loss.
- 4.8 We may contact a resident following the completion of work, or case closure, to arrange a follow up inspection, monitor the effectiveness of a solution, or gather feedback so that we can continue to learn what works well.
- 4.9 We will continue to improve the way we gather and analyse data to help us learn, and proactively work to reduce future damp and mould issues across our housing stock. Where appropriate, we will work with partners and experts outside of the organisation to ensure our approach remains up to date and effective.



5. Working with residents, and other assistance

- 5.1 Our Repairs policy reminds tenants and leaseholders of their responsibilities with regard to:
- Providing access - to repair, monitor or investigate
 - Reporting repairs promptly
 - Their repair and maintenance responsibilities
 - The terms of their tenancy or lease
 - Insurance
- 5.2 We recognise the importance of working with a resident to help us resolve issues. We may require a resident to undertake an action, or stop a particular action. This can include providing access promptly to stop a leak, limiting water condensing, improving ventilation or air circulation, and preventing or clearing mould growth. We may also recommend other actions or sources of advice that we ask a resident to follow or consider – such as a referral to an appropriate source of advice or support.
- 5.3 We may ask for additional information to help us to better understand what may be contributing to a problem, or what the impact may be on the household. This could include personal information about how and when a property is lived in or heated, a health condition, or even finances. While a resident is free to disclose or withhold such information, we will aim to be clear why we are asking this - which is to help us to get a fuller picture of the issues and challenges and arrive at a person centred solution. Any information disclosed will be processed in line with data protection principles.
- 5.4 Where we require an action to be taken, make a recommendation, or ask for additional information, we will aim to use clear language and instruction – which may include demonstrating an activity. We will check that residents are clear what we are asking them to do and will check if they need further support to carry out the action. Wherever possible, we will use a resident's preferred method of communication.
- 5.5 Where there is a cause and effect of a resident action, or inaction, which has either directly caused or contributed to property damage, we may take enforcement actions in line with the terms of the tenancy, licence, or lease. We may recharge certain costs to put things right in line with our Rechargeable costs policy.
- 5.6 Where a leaseholder or other landlord is responsible for undertaking or authorising work to stop a leak, or prevent damp and mould spread, we expect them to carry this out promptly, and failure to do so may result in further action.

6. Monitoring and reporting performance

- 6.1 We will implement this policy through comprehensive leak, damp and mould processes and procedures, which will have specific reporting and monitoring criteria. This may include active and closed case numbers, property data, causes, solutions used to resolve a case, and satisfaction data.
- 6.2 We aim to improve our capability to analyse and take an increasingly data led approach, for preventative work to understand and address patterns, and how we plan



asset investment. This may include collating and analysing information from customer feedback, surveys, repairs, and voids work.

- 6.3 Lewisham Council's Housing Executive Team will monitor damp and mould management through key performance indicators, reported monthly.

7. Legislation and regulation

- 7.1 Legislation and regulation relevant to this policy includes, but is not limited to:

- Housing Act 1985
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
- Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
- Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)
- Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023
- Awaab's law 2023

- 7.2 We will keep this policy and associated processes under review, and will respond to changes in legislation, regulation, as well as considering emerging good practice. This includes for example updates in building safety legislation and the review of the Decent Homes standard.

8. Equality, diversity, and inclusion

- 8.1 An Equality impact assessment was conducted as part of the development of this policy. We considered how housing conditions can have differing impacts on individuals and their households, particularly where someone has a vulnerability due to a health condition, disability, or age (older and younger).
- 8.2 We also considered where some households may be less able to carry out certain activities without extra support, including lower income households.
- 8.3 In addition, we concluded that we would need to use good communication - clear language and instruction, and make it easier for people to ask us questions about the process. This included considering people whose first language wasn't English, and people who may not be in a position to readily interact with us – for example to ask questions about the work we are undertaking or advice or instruction we might give.

9. Communication and consultation

- 9.1 The development of this policy has included consultation with residents¹.
- 9.2 We are continuing to widen the amount of training we offer staff – whether at a specialist level, or more widely to other staff to be able to identify and report possible cases of mould proactively. We will make this policy and its procedures available to staff via our intranet.

¹ This took place while our services were managed by Lewisham Homes



- 9.3 We will keep this policy available to residents through our website, and will share additional information relating to preventing damp and mould in other communications with residents – individually as a problem occurs, and more widely when appropriate.
- 9.4 Complaints will be handled under our Housing Services Complaints policy and processes.

10. Related documents

Related documents which support and complement this policy include but are not limited to:

- Required Access policy
- Repairs policy
- Temporary relocation (decanting) policy
- Compensation, reimbursement, and remedies policy

Replaces: Damp Mould and Leaks Policy April 2023 (Lewisham Homes) Minor updates to reflect the return of landlord services previously managed by Lewisham Homes to Lewisham Council	
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