

<b>MEETING</b>	Tenants and Leaseholders Panel
<b>DATE OF MEETING:</b>	23 <sup>rd</sup> April 2024
<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	Annual Review of Damp and Mould Service 2023-24

## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Following the publishing of the Coroner’s findings linked to the death of Awaab Ishak, a two year old living in Rochdale, Micheal Gove, the Secretary of State (DHLUC) issued a letter to all social landlords on 19 November 2022 to request they provide information to the Housing Regulator in respect of damp and mould cases within their portfolio and requested housing providers review their approach to investigating cases of damp and mould.
- 1.2 Following this intervention, the London Borough of Croydon (LBC) reviewed its approach to damp and mould and in January 2023, arranged for a separate service area to be set up to take the lead with investigating and resolving cases.
- 1.3 This report explains the remit of the damp and mould team, and the work that was undertaken between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, and some of the challenges faced in delivering the service in line with the damp and Mould policy.

## 2.0 Service Offer

- 2.1 Attached at Appendix 1 is the Damp and Mould policy. This sets out LBC’s approach to investigating cases and resolving issues faced by residents experiencing damp and mould in their homes.
- 2.2 The Damp and Mould team are responsible for:
- Delivering a service which takes a ‘zero-tolerance’ approach to damp and mould which is in line with the Housing Ombudsman ‘spotlight report’ on damp and mould and its recommendations. The report is attached at appendix 2.
  - Respond to reported cases, ensuring that a thorough investigation is undertaken, and any repairs/remedial works are carried out in line with our service offer, which is included in our Dam and Mould Policy and published on our website.
  - Raising the profile of damp and mould and ensuring information is accessible and advice is provided via newsletters, website, our contact centre and via our team.
  - Logging cases on Northgate (NEC); recording all events on NEC and ensuring works ordered are completed within target times. Monitoring adherence to key performance indicators and regular reporting.
- 2.3 LBC are stiving to offer a ‘best in class’ service to resident’s and this report sets out the service achievements for the first year following the mobilisation of this new team.

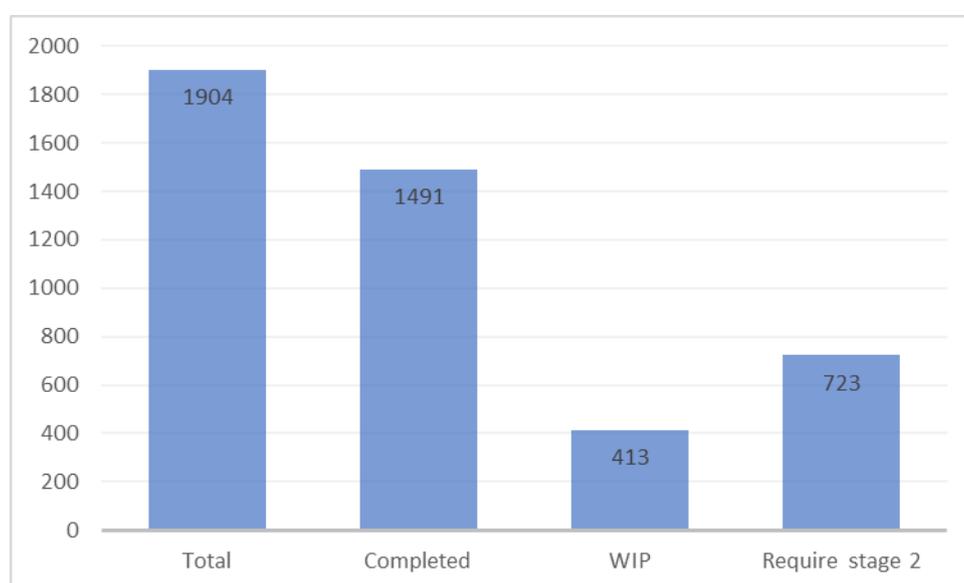
### **3.0 Service Delivery**

- 3.1 The damp and mould team were recruited between January and March 2023. The team consists of a manager, 3 surveyors and 2 admin. Shortly after its inception, training was offered to wider teams within repairs and asset management, housing management and temporary housing teams to ensure all resident facing officers understood the importance of reporting damp and mould cases if they witnessed this during visits to residents' homes.
- 3.2 Prior to 1 August 2023, repairs were undertaken by numerous specialist contractors, however, following the mobilisation of the new responsive repairs partnering contracts this work is now undertaken by Mears and Wates. Both contractors have set up dedicated teams of operatives and supervisors to manage this work.
- 3.3 With the introduction of Northgate (NEC), all cases are logged and tracked to resolution and reports are available to monitor adherence with KPIs. Process maps capture actions required and timescales for completion, and these are utilised for training new staff within repairs and wider housing teams. Our service offer information also includes timeframes for tasks, such as responding within 48 hours to an enquiry; undertaking a mould wash within 5 days (stage 1 visit) and revisiting all cases within 3 months (stage 2 visit) and 6 months to assess if the mould has been eradicated, or whether further remedial works are required. Additionally, following stage 2 visit, all cases have a bespoke action plan with timescales for work, which is developed by the surveyor and this action plan is shared with residents.
- 3.4 In some cases, it will be necessary to install additional extractor fans to support reducing condensation in the home, which leads to damp and mould. Humidistat heat recovery units are utilised, as well as 'positive mechanical ventilation systems' which increase the airflow in the home which supports reducing moisture.
- 3.5 Our damp and mould processes also extend to category 1 reports under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). These cases which are of a serious nature are prioritised and investigated within 24 hours.
- 3.6 In January 2024, the Government announced an 8-week consultation in respect of introducing new regulations linked to damp and mould. LBC, along with London Councils, responded to the consultation. The consultation focused on timescales for investigations and completion of works, along with improving communication with residents. We are awaiting the outcome of the consultation and expect new regulations to be introduced later this year.
- 3.7 In March 2024, we held 2 focus groups with residents who had reported damp and mould to us between February 2023 and February 2024. The purpose of the focus groups was to obtain feedback from residents with a 'lived experience' of our service, to support us to improve the service. 20 residents attended the focus groups and the feedback centred on Wates and Mears' performance for damp and mould. Within a few weeks of the focus groups, disappointingly we received a Housing Ombudsman

Serious Maladministration finding linked to a damp and mould case that had been reported to us in 2022. As part of the determination, the Ombudsman has ordered us to undertake a service review to identify gaps in our service, and ensure our processes meet the Housing Ombudsman code. The review is underway and will be completed by the end of April and will include the feedback we received from the resident focus groups held in March 2024. Going forward, we intend to hold focus groups annually as this is a hugely valuable feedback mechanism.

#### 4.0 Cases 2023/24

4.1 LBC attended 1,904 reported cases of damp and mould between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024. 768 cases were resolved at stage 1 of our process with 723 cases requiring works at stage 2, an extra 413 jobs have carried on into the 2024 financial year. A breakdown of cases is shown in the table below:



4.2 During 2023/24, we spent c£2.65m on repairs for the 1,491 reported cases of which c£1.06m was capitalised as the works were classed as component replacement or capital works.

4.3 23 Satisfaction surveys were taken and 22 came back clear with a positive outcome.

#### 5.0 Conclusion

5.1 The Damp and Mould team are still a relatively new team having only been in existence for 15 months. Our Damp and Mould Policy is robust and with a service review underway, this will ensure we learn from our experience of the first year of service and use the feedback to support us to make service improvement during 2024/25.

5.2 During 2024/25, we are keen to introduce technology to support us with identifying properties which may be more prone to damp and mould, and support residents to avoid damp and mould occurring in their home. In some cases, damp and mould will

be linked to fuel poverty, so it's important we ensure residents are maximising their income through benefits and our tenancy sustainment team can support us with this work. There are a number of devices on the market which are simple to use and provide a wealth of information which can assist us to support residents to reduce damp and mould in their homes.

5.3 We will use the data from the 1,491 cases reported to date to support us to identify damp and mould 'hot spots' and by encouraging residents to have devices in varying property types, this will help us gather further data which can be used to support us with future capital works programme planning.

## **6.0 Recommendation**

6.1 The Tenant and Leaseholders panel are asked to note this report.