

London Borough of Waltham Forest

Damp and Mould Policy

Policy purpose summary

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1. Purpose and scope

- 1.1. This policy sets out London Borough of Waltham Forest's approach as a social housing landlord to managing damp and mould in our general needs and independent living homes. It has been developed to be considered alongside our Repairs Policy.
- 1.2. We want to do everything we reasonably can to make sure our residents stay safe, healthy and well in their homes.
- 1.3. There are a number of factors that can cause damp, mould and condensation. The council treats all reports of damp and mould seriously and understands the potential health implications if left untreated, especially to groups that are particularly vulnerable, where health impacts can be more severe.
- 1.4. The aims of this policy are to ensure that:
 - Residents live in a safe and healthy home.
 - We adopt a zero-tolerance approach and provide a consistently high level of service in response to all reports of damp, mould and condensation.
 - We work with residents to resolve issues with damp, mould and condensation and do not blame lifestyle.
 - We comply with all legal and regulatory requirements.
 - We continue to embed a data-driven, risk-based approach so we can be more proactive in our approach to damp and mould, anticipating where issues may arise.
- 1.5. This policy applies to homes within the council's portfolio of general needs and independent living homes. It does not apply to the council's temporary accommodation used for homeless households. A separate procedure is in place for temporary accommodation.
- 1.6. For new build properties this policy is applicable once a property is outside of the defects liability period. Any issues that may arise within this period, will be addressed by the developer. We will support residents while the issues are being resolved with the developer.
- 1.7. Due to the diversity, age and construction of our housing stock, some properties will need more attention than others in relation to maintenance and levels of management for damp and mould conditions.
- 1.8. The terms 'the council', 'we', 'our' and 'us' mean London Borough of Waltham Forest.

2. Understanding damp and mould

- 1.9. Damp is the build-up of moisture in a property. It affects building materials (such as walls, floors, ceilings, foundations) and/or home furnishings and belongings (such as

carpets, curtains, wallpaper, furniture and clothing). In addition to causing damage, damp can also lead to the growth of mould and other microorganisms. Damp can occur in homes for a variety of reasons.

Condensation damp happens when moisture generated inside the home cools and condenses onto colder parts of the buildings (for example window frames, corners and low points on walls behind sofas or wardrobes). This is the most common form of damp. Conditions that can increase the risk of condensation are – inadequate ventilation, inadequate heating, inadequate thermal insulation, high humidity and poor building design and construction.

Penetrating damp is water that gets into the building from outside due to defects in the walls, roofs, windows or floors.

Rising damp is moisture from the ground that rises up through parts of the buildings in contact with the ground (walls and floors); it is usually found in older properties and is often misdiagnosed. Often it is due to defective damp proof courses and membranes.

Traumatic damp can be caused by leaking water from waste and heating pipes, overflowing baths or sinks, burst pipes or defective water storage vessels inside the building. Traumatic damp can also originate from outside the property, for example from another building or from environmental flooding.

Mould

Mould is a type of fungus which grows in moist environments. 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.

- 1.10. This information has been summarised from [Understanding and addressing the health risks of damp and mould in the home – GOV.UK](#)

3. Our commitments

- 1.11. We will take all reports of damp and mould seriously. We will use language in our communications that does not place blame on the resident and seek to establish a culture of collaborative working showing our residents empathy and respect.
- 1.12. We will take responsibility for identifying, investigating, understanding the causes of and resolving damp and mould as quickly and effectively as we can.
- 1.13. We will ensure to keep residents informed of our actions and next steps and communicate on a regular basis.
- 1.14. Our Asset Management Investment Strategy sets out our plans for investing in our homes. We will also aim to reduce the risk of damp and mould by improving the fabric of our homes and using technology to support early diagnosis and identify homes that may be particularly susceptible to damp and mould.

1.15. Leaseholders and shared owners

- 1.15.1. Leaseholders and shared owners are responsible for maintaining the inside of their home, this includes preventative methods for damp, mould and condensation. It is also the responsibility of the leaseholder or shared owner to keep their home in a good state of repair and to ensure any issues in their home do not impact on neighbours.
- 1.15.2. We are responsible for maintaining the structure of the home, and all shared areas. For damp and mould this relates to the building's structure such as the roof and guttering.
- 1.15.3. For our leaseholders and shared owners, we will meet the responsibilities as set out in the terms of the lease but will always provide relevant guidance and advice.

1.16. Target timescales

- 1.16.1. We aim to remove any immediate risk through a damp and mould wash within 24 hours of the issue being reported. Before removing the mould, we will take photos and record details to help identify the source of the mould and the action required to remedy it.
- 1.16.2. Unless the cause is immediately obvious, we will undertake a survey to try and understand the cause and actions required to remedy it. We aim to undertake the survey within 7 calendar days of the issue being reported by the resident. Within 2 working days of undertaking the survey the surveyor will submit their report, inform the resident of the findings and any works that will need to be undertaken, and raise any required works orders.
- 1.16.3. If the survey identifies a hazard that poses significant risk to the health and safety of a resident, we will begin repair works as soon as possible and within 7 days of the survey being completed.
- 1.16.4. Where repair works are required to address the cause of damp and mould, we will complete the repair within a reasonable time period (which will depend on the type of repair) and inform the resident of this timescale. We aim to complete all the works within 28 calendar days of the issue being reported by the resident.
- 1.16.5. When works are needed that do not relate to the root cause of the damp and mould and they require a planned/project approach, works will be prioritised on the programme and residents will be advised of the timescales.
- 1.16.6. We will contact the resident approximately 3 months after the work has been completed to confirm that the issue has been resolved. However, if a resident has any concerns that the issue has not been resolved they should contact our Damp and Mould Taskforce.

1.17. Planning works in residents' homes

- 1.17.1. When planning works, we will take into account the health conditions and vulnerabilities of residents in the household.
- 1.17.2. We will keep residents informed of any property inspections, diagnosis of issues and the timetabling of works, where these are required. This includes explaining what work might be needed and why. If any changes to the programme of works are needed, we will keep residents informed. Where work is not required, residents will be advised, and we will explain the reason why and any steps they should take.
- 1.17.3. In some complex cases a process of elimination may be required, and a period of monitoring will be necessary after completion of each element of works. In very complex cases we aim to give the resident a single point of contact.
- 1.17.4. We will inspect a percentage of all works undertaken in relation to damp and mould and will also undertake an inspection if requested by the resident.
- 1.17.5. We will work with our residents to ensure ease of access and agree appointment times. If we are denied access for no good reason, continually prevented from entry or we receive no response from our requests then we will escalate actions to gain entry, which may include legal action. We will follow our No Access Process if this occurs.

4. Supporting our residents

- 1.18. Where damp and mould are a result of condensation, we will support residents to alleviate any contributing factors that might exacerbate the issue, for example, by improving poor ventilation or offering advice about how to control moisture levels. Information is also available on our website www.walthamforest.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants/damp-and-mould-guidance-council-tenants
- 1.19. We also recognise that residents who could struggle with fuel costs will find it more difficult to control moisture levels. More information about the financial support available to residents struggling with the cost of heating their home and our Fuel Poverty Strategy is available on our website www.walthamforest.gov.uk/housing/energy-efficiency/how-reduce-your-energy-bills
- 1.20. When a damp or mould problem is continuing due to property conditions such as hoarding or overcrowded conditions, we will ensure appropriate referrals for support are made.
- 1.21. If a resident prefers, they can authorise someone to communicate on their behalf. This could be a friend/relative or representative from an external organisation. In these circumstances we will require authorisation from the resident.

- 1.22. We will ensure our service is delivered in an accessible and flexible way to meet the diverse and differing needs of our residents. Reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- 1.23. As set out in [Understanding and addressing the health risks of damp and mould in the home – GOV.UK](#) it is particularly important that the groups below are prioritised when dealing with damp and mould as they are at higher risk due to a vulnerability and/or health-condition:
- 1.23.1. People with a pre-existing health condition (for example allergies, asthma, COPD, cystic fibrosis, other lung diseases and cardiovascular disease) who are at risk of their condition worsening and have a higher risk of developing fungal infections and/or additional allergies
 - 1.23.2. People of all ages who have a weakened immune system, such as people who have cancer or are undergoing chemotherapy, people who have had a transplant, or other people who are taking medications that suppress their immune system
 - 1.23.3. People living with a mental health condition
 - 1.23.4. Pregnant women, their unborn babies and women who have recently given birth, who may have weakened immune systems
 - 1.23.5. Children and young people whose organs are still developing and are therefore more likely to suffer from physical conditions such as respiratory problems
 - 1.23.6. Children and young people who are at risk of worsening mental health
 - 1.23.7. Older people
 - 1.23.8. People who are bedbound, housebound or have mobility problems making it more difficult for them to get out of a home with damp and mould and into fresh air.
- 1.24. If it is unsafe for residents to remain in their home whilst 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. We will take into account any medical conditions or vulnerabilities of residents in the household. This will be considered in accordance with our [Decant Policy](#).
- 1.25. In some cases, it may be necessary to re-house a family on a permanent basis due to the medical needs of the household or if the household is overcrowded. This will be considered in accordance with our [Allocation Scheme](#).

5. How you can report damp and mould

- 1.26. Damp and mould are easier to tackle when they are caught early. You can report damp and mould by either:

- Completing our online form which is available on the council's website at www.walthamforest.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants/damp-and-mould-guidance-council-tenants
- Calling our customer resolution centre on 0208 496 4197

6. Staff training

- 1.27. We are committed to ensuring all relevant front-line staff are trained and understand their roles and responsibilities in meeting the aims of this policy.
- 1.28. We will ensure our contractors and partners have the required skills to diagnose and remedy damp and mould.
- 1.29. We will regularly review the training we are providing and ensure it is up-to-date, effective, and meets all the latest requirements.

7. Responding to complaints and learning lessons

- 1.30. If a resident is not satisfied with the way a report of damp and mould has been handled, they can make a complaint in line with our [Complaints Policy](#). Any award of redress or financial compensation will be scaled appropriately to reflect the extent of any service failings identified and will take into account the Housing Ombudsman's guidance.
- 1.31. When undertaking works, we will take all reasonable precautions to complete the works without causing damage to the resident's belongings or fittings. Where damage is caused directly as a result of the act or omissions of the council or a contractor working on our behalf, compensation may be paid. If the cause or facts of the damage is in dispute, we will investigate. Compensation will be assessed in line with our Compensation Policy.
- 1.32. As a landlord or freeholder we insure the structure of residents' homes but residents are responsible for insuring their personal property and the decoration of their home. The council will not be liable and will not pay for the contents of a resident's home such as furniture, carpets, personal items or appliances, if they are damaged in an accident such as a flood.
- 1.33. Once the complaints process is completed, and if the issue has not been resolved, a resident can escalate their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.
- 1.34. Lessons learned from positive feedback, complaints and Housing Ombudsman cases will be integrated into service improvements and training to help deliver positive change.

8. Performance monitoring and assurance

- 1.35. We will monitor open and closed damp and mould cases to ensure that problems do not persist and that interventions are concluded.
- 1.36. We will monitor contractor performance at contract performance review meetings to ensure contractual standards are achieved and residents are satisfied with the service provided. Any non-compliance will be managed through an agreed improvement plan.
- 1.37. To measure and monitor our effectiveness and to provide assurance we have a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that are measured and reported monthly to the Housing Leadership Team.
- 1.38. We aim to improve our capability to take an increasingly data led approach so we can be more proactive in our approach to damp and mould, anticipating where issues may arise. This may include collating and analysing information from resident feedback, surveys, repairs and voids work.

9. Equalities and diversity, vulnerability, and reasonable adjustments

- 1.39. When implementing this policy, the council will have regard to the Equalities Act 2010 and show due regard to an individual's medical condition or vulnerability such as mental health and learning disabilities, as and when applicable.

10. Key legal and regulatory references

- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 (Section 11)
- Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
- Decent Homes Standard 2006
- Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)
- Section 79 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990
- Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023
- Regulator of Social Housing's Regulatory Standards

11. Monitoring and review

- 1.40. We will monitor the effectiveness of the policy and recommend policy changes to improve service delivery.
- 1.41. As this policy is new it will be reviewed after 12 months and then every three years or on the introduction of new legislation or best practice guidelines.