

Resident Questions for Housing Area Panel

Reference: W3.1

Question Title	Damp and mould
Date question raised	15/12/2022
Week of Area Panel	13/2/2023
Area in city	West
Star rating applied by residents	3 stars – city wide
Deadline for officer response	9am on 19 th January
Name of officer responding	Grant Ritchie
Officer job title	Head of Repairs and Maintenance

Resident Question

Issue:	There are major problems with damp and mould in Brighton & Hove Council properties and it can be very difficult to get this problem addressed by the Council. As a result, many people are living in distressing and potentially dangerous conditions caused by damp and mould.
Background:	<p>There has been a lot of publicity recently about the serious consequences of damp and mould in people’s homes. Tragically, long-term exposure to black mould was responsible for a respiratory condition that killed a two-year-old in Rochdale.</p> <p>A Housing Ombudsman report in October 2021 said that addressing damp and mould needs to be a higher priority for landlords, with a change in culture from reactive to proactive. The report, ‘Spotlight on damp and mould—it’s not lifestyle’ made recommendations to social landlords about reviewing and improving their practice and policies. It recommended taking a more proactive approach to ensure homes are dry and warm. The full report can be found here: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Spotlight-report-Damp-and-mould-final.pdf</p> <p>A letter (November 2022) from the Government Regulator of Social Housing to CEOs of large social housing providers (including Councils) said that all providers should have systems in place to ensure that their homes are free from hazardous levels of damp and mould, and to identify and deal with cases promptly and effectively. They have asked the Council to provide extensive information on how they are ensuring that the Decent Homes Standard is met. The full text of the letter can be found here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/letters-to-registered-providers-about-damp-and-mould/letter-to-ceos-of-large-rps-regarding-damp-and-mould-accessible-version</p>
Action requested:	Request a report and discussion at next Area Panel (February 2023) on what action the Council is taking around damp and mould. This should include:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What information the Council currently have on the extent of damp and mould issues in Council properties. b. What action the Council has taken in response to the Housing Ombudsman's report (published in November 2021). c. Request Area Panel updates on the Council's response to the Government. The Council have been asked to provide extensive information to the Government on how they are ensuring that the Decent Homes Standard is met for damp and mould. Of particular importance is how the Council will ensure that damp and mould cases are identified and dealt with promptly and effectively when raised by tenants and residents.
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Officer Response

Officer contact details:	Grant Ritchie
Officer Response:	<p>Q. What information the Council currently have on the extent of damp and mould issues in Council properties.</p> <p>As a council, we are committed to working with our tenants and residents to address the issues of damp and mould and ensure the health and safety of those living in our homes.</p> <p>Our approach is to work with tenants to understand the cause of the damp and mould issues they may face and work together to find a solution. While there are some measures a tenant can take to reduce damp and mould problems, we recognise that there may be other factors outside of a tenant's control. This may be linked to issues such as: vulnerability; low income; overcrowding in some of our homes; increases in heating costs; a lack of clothes drying facilities in flats.</p> <p>Unfortunately, condensation dampness issues do occur in our housing stock. Different properties have different challenges, for example lack of adequate insulation or adequate ventilation, insufficient heating system, or the condition of the external fabric (brickwork, pointing etc).</p> <p>There may be barriers to resident reporting problems. We try to work with tenants and other stakeholders to remove barriers to ensure tenants are able to engage with our services, and to report issues, including damp and mould.</p> <p>We are working hard to maintain our continuous improvement of the standard of our council housing stock. Helping residents live in well insulated, efficiently heated, healthy homes is a key investment objective, supported through our Housing Revenue Account (HRA) capital programme. In terms of asset management there will be particular emphasis on improvements in property insulation, window installation and mechanical ventilation.</p> <p>Our 23/24 budget proposals include investment of over £34m in existing council homes, including increasing our investment in damp</p>

and condensation measures as well as our overall investment in planned and major works.

As a service we have seen a significant increase in reports of dampness and condensation in our homes following the tragic case in Rochdale.

As reported to Housing Committee in Chairs' communication on the 18th of January, we currently have 708 damp jobs raised with our Housing Repairs and Maintenance service. This represents a 33% increase since December 2022. As well as utilising our in-house Repairs and Maintenance resource we have also increased our specialist contractor capacity to address the number of reports we currently have.

Q. What action the Council has taken in response to the Housing Ombudsman's report (published in November 2021).

In October 2021, the Housing Ombudsman released a spotlight report on damp and mould issues. This produced a 26-point list of recommended improvements for landlord to consider how their current and future approach can be modified/improved to better manage this serious issue. We have used these recommendations as guidance when shaping our response to damp and mould concerns and particularly when selecting the specialist contractors (outlined below) to support us with this work. We have also increased our budget allocation for this work in the budget proposals for 2023 / 2024.

Q. Update Area Panel on the Council's response to the Government. How are the Council ensuring that the decent homes standard is met for damp and mould. How will the Council ensure that damp and mould cases are identified and dealt with promptly and effectively.

We have responded to the Social Housing Regulator with the information they have requested from all social landlords.

The Council have a proactive approach to managing damp works. We have a dedicated team to manage reported damp concerns. To support this team and extend the scope of our works we have appointed a number of specialist contractors. This will give us additional resource to respond to damp problems and be more proactive in dealing with the route cause.

This group of contractors is designed to provide:

- Specialist surveying resource
- Specialist damp treatment works
- Specialist damp remedial works
- Cavity wall insulation

We are working with colleagues in other council services, including Families, Children and Learning and Public Health, to identify families and vulnerable individuals particularly at risk. We are also working to identify properties with damp and mould and raise awareness to the risks and the need to report cases.

Since the tragic death in Rochdale reported in the national media we have seen a significant increase in cases of damp and mould as awareness grows. We are currently focusing on our response to these cases. We do this in three phases,

1. Visit the property to assess the extent of the mould, establish the priority and specify remedial works.
2. Wash Down the affected area and apply anti-fungal treatment and anti mould paint.
3. In cases where penetrating damp is identified undertake remedial works to remove the source of the damp.

The majority of damp and mould reported is as a result of condensation. In these cases, we will generally wash down the affected area and apply treatments. During this visit we will also talk to tenants about the causes of condensation and try and help establish if there is anything that the tenant can do to reduce the risk of condensation occurring. However, we are very clear that this is not about blame, it's about understanding the cause and working together to find a solution.

Condensation generally occurs when one or more things happen some of which may be outside of the tenants control. In these cases, we will often fit electric fans to the kitchen and bathroom or in some cases insulate the internal walls of properties. Each case can be very different and requires different solutions.

For general advice, our new '[Condensation, damp and mould in your home](https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/condensation-damp-and-mould-your-home)' webpage - <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/condensation-damp-and-mould-your-home> is now live and linked with an extra line on our main [Ask for a repair to your council home](https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/ask-repair-your-council-home) webpage - <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/ask-repair-your-council-home>. We also have a leaflet that we share with tenants which gives practical advice on prevention and early treatment of condensation and mould.

We are also beginning to use technical monitoring equipment. This measures the amount of moisture in the air and the temperature in the home. This data helps us analyse the environment and more accurately pinpoint cause of the condensation.

We can also leave air purifiers and dehumidifiers in residents' homes where necessary, pending the initial treatment.

Given the significant increase in the number of reported cases, which has impacted upon some response times, we are prioritising cases

	<p>based on risk and we are working with our contractors to increase the number of calls we do a week and reduce the waiting time.</p> <p>In addition to directly tackling the problem we are also increasing loft insulation where necessary and, in some cases, are installing cavity wall insulation.</p> <p>We continue to take this issue very seriously and understand the concern that this is causing. Particularly the impact this may have on vulnerable people, the old and the young. We are prioritising cases following a risk-based approach to ensure an effective and timely response to families and vulnerable residents potentially most at risk. However, we are adding to our resources and increasing our overall capacity to respond.</p> <p>Information is also being made available to help tenants who are worried about fuel bills and the general pressure on the cost of living. Information has been included on our web site, other information leaflets and we would encourage anyone worried by these issues to contact us.</p>
Action:	N/A
Start date:	
End date:	

