

# South Cambridgeshire District Council

## Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy

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## 1. Purpose

- 1.1. The aim of our Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy is to set out the approach South Cambridgeshire District Council will take to prevent and resolve cases of damp, mould and condensation in the homes we provide through effective and timely actions. By following the approach set out in our policy we will minimise the negative impact damp, mould and condensation has on the health and wellbeing of residents, and on the fabric of our properties.
- 1.2. This policy applies to both tenants and leaseholders of South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC). In terms of leaseholders, the Council will only be responsible for remedial works where damp, mould and condensation are identified resulting from the external fabric of the building. For all other landlords, damp and mould issues should be reported to the Council's Environmental Health Team.
- 1.3. The Policy links with our policy for carrying out responsive repairs and has been developed in response to the Housing Ombudsman's report of October 2021 '*Spotlight on damp and mould: it's not lifestyle*'. The report recommends that landlords adopt a consolidated and comprehensive policy in relation to damp, mould and condensation, including:
  - Establishing a clear and transparent framework on the approach to diagnosis and use of independent expertise.
  - The steps to take depending on whether the issues are structural or not.
  - Timescales, effective communication, and appropriate mitigations.
  - The approach to after care.
- 1.4. The intention is for the Policy to give us as landlord and our tenants and leaseholders as residents full insight and clarity around how we will be proactive in taking the positive steps needed.
- 1.5. Ultimately, the purpose of our Policy is to strengthen our culture, behaviour, and approach to tackling the challenge of damp, mould, and condensation. It will mean we are on the front foot in identifying, then effectively managing, issues.



## 2. Scope

**2.1.** The Policy covers how in practice we will have a three-pronged approach around PREVENTING, TACKLING and MANAGING damp, mould and condensation cases. It sets out how we will:

- Meet all applicable legislation and requirements.
- Ensure a clear understanding across teams about the different sorts of damp, mould and condensation problems, their causes, and effects.
- Respond positively, effectively, and efficiently to any problems that are reported or identified so we resolve and remedy matters in a timely manner and with effective communications.
- Effect proper repairs (including redecoration), install preventative ventilation measures and hold positive discussions with residents so we have the best chance of ‘putting things right’ and effect lasting solutions.
- Make sure the repair and maintenance work we carry out helps, wherever possible, to prevent or tackle damp, mould, and condensation problems.
- Carry out cyclical and planned maintenance that helps minimise and reduce the incidence of damp, mould and condensation.
- Continue and improve our planned programme of improvement works that raises our minimum acceptable standards of insulation, heating, and ventilation, thus reducing the potential for damp, mould and condensation problems to arise.
- Consult, involve and engage our involved residents, and residents more widely, in our work on helping prevent and tackle damp, mould and condensation to ensure we meet their priorities and expectations.
- Monitor and evaluate our approaches, performance, and results in preventing, tackling, and managing damp, mould and condensation cases.

## 3. Background

**3.1.** Damp, or the presence of moisture within a building, is a common problem in the UK. The single largest cause of damp is condensation, whereby water from the air settles in liquid form onto comparatively cool surfaces like windows or exterior walls.

**3.2.** However, damp can also be caused by water ingress into a property due to, for example, blocked gutters or leaking pipes (known as penetrating damp). Another cause could be a



broken or absent damp proof course resulting in groundwater rising up the walls of a property (known as rising damp). Water ingress can also contribute to condensation.

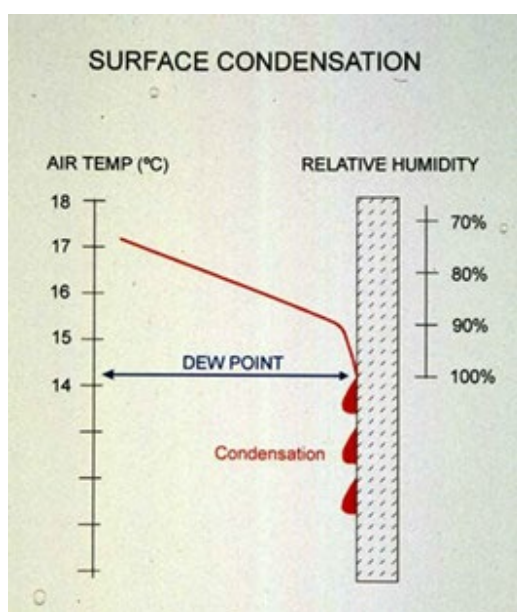
- 3.3.** A potential consequence of damp (particularly condensation) is the growth of mould, a fungal organism that replicates through the production of spores. These spores can cause a variety of health issues, from acting as an allergen to causing respiratory difficulties. As highlighted in the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)<sup>1</sup>, the mental health implications of living in a damp and mouldy home can also be significant.
- 3.4.** In accordance with the guidance provided by the Housing Ombudsman, we aim to adopt a zero-tolerance approach to damp, mould, and condensation.
- 3.5.** This means we must be proactive in seeking opportunities to prevent cases before they arise, as well as managing reports of damp, mould and condensation effectively and treating them with the seriousness that they require. We will also aim to provide good aftercare to residents affected by damp, mould and condensation, collecting feedback to learn from past cases.
- 3.6. Damp and mould issues are generally because of:**
- High levels of moisture being present in the air (known as relative humidity).
  - Condensation being present – condensation occurs when moist air meets a colder surface like a wall, window, mirror etcetera. The air can't hold the moisture and tiny drops of water appear. It also occurs in places the air is still, like the corners of rooms, behind furniture or inside wardrobes.
  - 'Penetrating damp' is caused by moisture coming into the house through leaking or cracked pipework, a damaged roof, blocked guttering, gaps around window frames and cracked or defective rendering and brickwork. All these problems can be remedied.
  - 'Rising damp' is due to a defective (or non-existent) damp course. This will leave a 'tide mark' about a metre above the floor. Fixing rising damp is a job for a qualified builder.
  - Lack residual temperature within the property due to it being insufficiently heated.
  - A lack of effective natural or mechanical ventilation being present within the home.

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<sup>1</sup> Housing, Health and Safety rating system (HHSRS) is a risk-based evaluation tool to help local authorities identify and protect against potential risks and hazards to health and safety from any deficiencies identified in dwellings.

### What is mould and when does it form?

- 3.7. Black Mould is a type of fungus that grows and develops in damp or humid conditions. Depending on how serious the mould problem is, it can vary in appearance.
- 3.8. Black mould starts to produce spores – these allow mould to keep reproducing and growing and if not treated correctly, being around mould can lead to health issues.
- 3.9. Most damp and mould causes are because of condensation, and it not being combatted effectively. Condensation will form on a surface when it reaches the dew point. This happens when the moisture in the air reaches 100% and meets a surface that has a temperature of 14 degrees or less.
- 3.10. Damp and mould can also be caused due to consistently high levels of water or moisture entering the fabric of the building. Rising and penetrating damp will need a construction-based intervention.



## 4. Legislation

- 4.1. Our work in tackling damp and mould is critical to ensure we meet our responsibilities as a landlord, as set out in law. Details of the relevant legislation is listed at Appendix A to this policy.
- 4.2. As a council and social landlord, South Cambridgeshire District Council is required to sign up to the Housing Ombudsman scheme. This provides a further means of redress for residents should we not fully meet our obligations.



## 5. Proactive Identification and Prevention of Damp, Mould and Condensation

- 5.1. Our aim is to take a fabric-first approach to preventing damp, mould and condensation, coupled with a positive approach to helping residents avoid inadvertently ending up with a damp, mould or condensation problem.

### Effective Repairs and Maintenance Systems

- 5.2. Our revised Repairs and Maintenance Policy has been revised to accommodate all recent updates to housing regulations and increased commitment to our residents and the involvement from them, this sets out our commitments and arrangements for carrying out day to day responsive repairs. These are a critical component in our approach to preventing mould, damp and condensation as they give residents and the Council the opportunity to pick up and act on any repairs that need carrying out, fixing leaks or blockages, or identifying the first signs of a breakdown in the building fabric. We will therefore ensure that the repairs call centre, operatives, surveyors, and all involved in the day-to-day repairs process are alert to the importance of their role in:

- Asking on all occasions when dealing with residents about repairs whether, aside from the issue being reported, they are experiencing any problems with damp, mould, or condensation in their home.
- Responding positively and proactively on the first and all subsequent occasions to all repairs and problems reported by residents.
- Introducing a new survey system to include dedicated Damp and Mould survey designs which can be allocated to dedicated staff to carry out.

We have restructured the Council's surveying team to include a dedicated Damp, Mould and Disrepair surveyor, solely dedicated to reacting and resolve these issues promptly, coupled with effective communications and engagement with residents at all stages.

- Discussing and escalating concerns with maintenance officers or surveyors so that further inspections, works or investigations can be carried out. Utilising specialist contractors for in-depth surveys and remedial works where needed. Principally providing advice and education to residents throughout the process.
- Training staff and operatives, whether in-house or contractors, to identify and report early signs of damp, mould and condensation.



- As well as our general repairs reporting process, we also have a dedicated email address to report damp, mould and condensation issues directly to the team to act upon – [dampandmould@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:dampandmould@scambs.gov.uk)

### When a repair is reported, we will:

- Assess the details of the report to determine severity and appropriate reaction. Guidance sheet to be used for reference.
- Our repairs contractor will react and address minor decorative issues and associated works from leaks.
- The repairs contractor will direct the more major reports to SCDC for action and survey.
- Make reasonable attempts to access the property to carry out works.
- Complete a property inspection – this may include taking damp and humidity measurements. We will aim to complete this within 10 working days from initial report.
- We may install a temporary data logger to assist investigating the potential causes. The data logger is an electronic device that records data over time which enables a comprehensive, accurate picture of the environmental conditions being monitored, such as air temperature and relative humidity.
- We will evaluate the results of the inspection and data logger if installed and identify any factors that may have led to damp and mould growth.
- Sterilise the areas where damp and mould are visible as well as 1m around the area by way of specialised treatment.
- Undertake any repairs identified that could be contributing to damp, mould and condensation forming such as leaks, structural holes or unblocking gutters.
- Keep tenants informed of progress.
- Put in place more permanent measures such as installing additional ventilation or insulation where deemed appropriate.

### Information and Advice

- 5.3.** We will develop and use effective information and documentation, such as leaflets, to help us work effectively with residents to help them avoid damp, mould, and condensation problems. This information and advice will be available on the Council's website. It is crucial that in providing advice we strike the right tone and avoid suggesting blame. To make sure we get our approach right, we will work in partnership with involved





resident groups and affiliated professional organisations to develop the materials, then test and trial them before rolling them out.

- 5.4.** Our approach will also include working with residents to ensure the information, materials and support provided is as effective as possible in helping residents to avoid damp, mould and condensation in their home.
- 5.5.** However, we recognise we must not solely place the onus on the resident for resolving any damp, mould and condensation problems. This means our materials will also include information on how we will go about evaluating what sort of repairs or remedial works we may be able to carry out, as well as measures or mitigations we can put in place to support in cases where structural interventions are not appropriate, satisfying ourselves and demonstrating to residents, that we are taking all reasonable steps.

### Empty Property Works

- 5.6.** When we carry out checks, repairs, and upgrade work to empty properties it provides an ideal opportunity to also seek to minimise the future potential for damp, mould and condensation problems occurring.
- 5.7.** As outlined in the SCDC relet specification, all empty properties will be fitted with the following damp, mould and condensation prevention measures before they are considered fit for re-letting:
- Humidity controlled extractor fans in kitchens and bathrooms.
  - Window trickle vents are to be checked to ensure they are clear and working.
  - Gutter and downpipe clearance.
  - Additional internal insulation to surfaces identified as being 'cold', such as window reveals in bathrooms.

### Stock Condition Surveys and Data

- 5.8.** To support our approach to prevention, we will make use of our periodic stock condition surveys to identify cases of damp and mould, to ask residents if they are experiencing any problems with damp, mould or condensation, and if they have previously reported damp, mould or condensation problems but they persist.
- 5.9.** We will also use our stock condition data to establish where improvements could be made to reduce the risk of damp, mould and condensation problems occurring. We will act on the insight from surveys to inform a range of proactive preventative works, including insulation upgrades and / or installation of better heating or improved

mechanical ventilation. We will also use the insight from surveys to support a range of management interventions, working positively with residents to advise and guide them on the most effective way in which to heat and ventilate their home and measures to limit the production and spreading of moisture from day-to-day activities.

- 5.10.** We are reforming the way we collect and analyse stock condition data, to improve the capture of category 1 and 2 HHSRS hazards. This will improve our ability to identify and remedy the most serious cases of damp, mould and condensation.
- 5.11.** We will also use surveys, including those carried out where cases of damp, mould and condensation are being investigated, to help predict the properties or situations more prone to damp and mould cases arising. We will use this information, data trends and insight to help identify those properties or household types most 'at risk'. This will involve identifying and searching out hidden issues based on knowledge and insights around:
- The age and construction type of properties.
  - History, patterns, and trends in day-to-day repairs.
  - Profile of occupants, notably households where there is overcrowding.

## 6. Responding to Reports of Damp, Mould and Condensation

### Overview of Process

- 6.1.** As part of our zero-tolerance approach to damp and mould, we have produced a bespoke damp, mould and condensation process. Low risk issues will be dealt with by the Repairs Contractor and a SCDC surveyor will check with the tenant after one, three and six months to ensure no reoccurrence. High risk issues will be directed to a SCDC surveyor for a more detailed response, investigation, and monitoring.
- 6.2.** The process is risk based. All cases are assessed and allocated into one of two categories, which will inform the resulting actions:
- **Low Risk** – Localised damp or mould growth affecting an area less than 0.5m<sup>2</sup>.
  - **High Risk** – Clearly identified as a HHSRS Category 1 or 2 Hazard, or widespread damp, condensation or mould growth affecting an area more than 0.5m<sup>2</sup> or multiple areas.
- 6.3.** All damp, mould and condensation cases will be managed by the SCDC surveyor dedicated to damp, mould and disrepair. All reports from any source will be actioned generally within 10 days of the report with a plan of action and schedule. Any low-risk



reports dealt with directly by the Repairs Contractor will be reconciled on a weekly basis with the SCDC surveyor.

### Ensuring an effective and efficient initial response to repairs

- 6.4.** It is critical that in our initial response we recognise the nature of what is being reported and take clear details from the resident or other person making the report. This is so we can respond to the issue in a timely manner that reflects the circumstances or urgency of the problem in accordance with our risk-based approach.
- 6.5.** Our standard repairs reporting process via our Repairs Contractor is the critical first step to fixing things if they have gone wrong, as well as identifying any underlying problem that may be causing damp, mould, or condensation. The repairs reporting process gives residents and the Council the opportunity to pick up and act on any repair requirements, such as leaks or blockages, or the first signs of a breakdown in the building fabric. Alternatively, residents may report damp, mould and condensation problems direct to the Council via the dedicated email address: [dampandmould@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:dampandmould@scambs.gov.uk)
- 6.6.** We will therefore ensure that the repairs call centre, operatives carrying out repairs as part of the Council's repairs contract, and all involved in our standard day to day repairs process are alert to the need to respond positively and proactively on the first and subsequent occasions to all repairs and problems reported. Our overall approach at this stage is to:
- Diagnose the problem as effectively as we can at the earliest point possible so the right action and repair works can be carried out. To do this, the call centre will use a set of agreed questions.
  - Ensure effective communications and engagement with residents at all stages.
  - Discuss and escalate any concerns with SCDC surveyors so that any inspections, additional works, or investigations can be carried out.
  - Be on the look-out for any early signs of damp and mould problems so they can be quickly identified and resolved.

## Our initial repair response actions

- 6.7.** In all cases where instances of damp and mould are reported or identified we will make sure we:
- Obtain wherever possible by email or smartphone a photograph of the problem (ideally from the resident) to fully record the issue and to help diagnose the best response.
  - Provide a copy of our Damp, Mould and Condensation leaflet that explains how the Council and residents can work together to help prevent and tackle damp, mould, and condensation.
  - Send an operative within our standard agreed timescales with the aim of identifying the cause of the problem and of how best to remedy the issue.
  - Fix and make good any disrepair or damage, such as to roof, pipes, drains.
  - Clean, disinfect, apply anti-mould protection, then reinstate decorations.
  - Take a photograph of the completed works and redecorated area.
  - Take the resident through our Damp, Mould and Condensation Leaflet, explaining the steps they and the Council can take to help prevent and address any further problems.
  - Close off the job on the repairs system.
  - Follow up with the resident at one, three, and six months following the remedial works to ensure sustainability and if there is a need to reattend.
- 6.8.** In some cases, the SCDC surveyor may be unable to diagnose the cause of a problem and / or may decide the nature and extent of the issue is especially serious. If so, they should refer the matter to the SCDC specialist contractor for Damp and Mould to attend to carry out further investigation so they can specify the remedial works needed or seek a further specialist structural survey to help specify and carry out works that will resolve the problem.
- 6.9.** The nature, scope and extent of the works and measures carried out or installed at properties because of reports of damp, mould and condensation will vary depending on the individual circumstances of each case. However, these may include:
- Thorough cleaning and disinfecting of the affected surfaces, then applying an anti-mould protection solution and thermal paint. This work may be carried out as the sole remedy, or may need to follow other works, such as replastering.
  - Fixing of leaking roof, pipes, or drains



- Removal and reinstatement of plaster surfaces
- Supply and fixing of insulation or insulated materials to 'cold' walls or surfaces, along with
- Installation of individual extractor fan unit or whole house or other ventilation system which may include trimming doors or adding vents for increased air flow through the property.

**6.10.** In all cases the remedial works will be followed by:

- Cleaning, disinfecting, applying anti-mould protection and reinstating decorations using specialist thermal paint.
- Taking photographs 'before' and 'after' the works
- Closing off the job on the repairs system
- Making a diary note to ring the resident at intervals after completion of the repair to check that the problem has remained 'fixed'.

**6.11.** We will work closely with the call centre service team to make sure robust record keeping systems and processes are maintained that support our risk-based approach to the reporting of all repairs, including damp, mould and condensation issues.

**6.12.** It is also important that the call centre team responds positively and sensitively to what residents' report, avoiding any tendency to dismiss the seriousness of the issue or using language that leaves the resident feeling blamed.

**6.13.** We will make sure clear and regular communications are maintained with residents throughout the whole repairs process. This will include information and explanation of all the actions taken (or otherwise) to resolve the report of damp, mould and condensation.

### Serious Cases and Vulnerability Factors

**6.14.** The Council will take into account vulnerability factors in terms of health and wellbeing when considering the actions to be taken in carrying out remedial works. Residents most at risk are identified as the very young, elderly or those with a disability or health condition, such as asthma, allergies or other chronic conditions. Where residents have any vulnerabilities or needs within their household that require extra support, the Council will work with them to make any reasonable adjustments to the process based on their individual circumstances.

**6.15.** If works required are more intrusive in nature, or where personal circumstances and vulnerabilities mean residents are unable to remain in their home, the Council will look for

a temporary solution to move to alternative accommodation whilst the works are carried out. In the most serious cases the option to move permanently by way of a direct let may be considered where appropriate.

### Recurring Cases

**6.16.** Sometimes, it is possible that, despite attending and carrying out routine or other works under our standard repair processes, a problem of damp and mould returns. If this happens, we will ensure that a repeat notification by a resident of a damp and mould issue or identification through the follow-up arrangements is designated and flagged as a '**Recurring Case**'. This will allow us to take additional steps to try and make sure the problem is resolved and remains fixed.

**6.17.** In recurring cases we will:

- Make sure the call centre clearly identifies cases where damp and mould may be the whole, or part, of the problem being reported again, clearly recording that the problem has already been attended to previously (a repeat report of a problem).
- Request further photographs of the problem, to be submitted by email or smartphone.
- Recurring cases to be reported to the Damp, Mould and Disrepair surveyor at SCDC for them to assess, liaising with a specialist external surveyor as needed. Reports should be forwarded to the dedicated email address:  
[dampandmould@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:dampandmould@scambs.gov.uk)
- The purpose of assigning the problem as a recurring case is to ensure the issue is clearly identified for further, more in-depth action and that all steps to resolve the case are decided on, carried out and that full records and audit trail are kept.

**6.18.** The timescales for acting on a further reported problem is that it should be attended to within 10 working days in one of three ways:

- A SCDC surveyor attends to carry out a detailed inspection and specify appropriate repair and / or remediation works. These should be started within the next five to 21 working days depending on the nature and scale of the specified works.
- Installation of a data logger device to capture data over a period of time to help identify the extent of the problem.
- A specialist external firm of damp and mould specialists is engaged where necessary, to attend and survey the property and assess the most appropriate

range of measures to be carried out to remedy the problem. We will start the identified works as quickly as we can, generally within 21 days where possible.

### Timescales

**6.19.** In responding to damp, mould and condensation cases, we will aim to follow the timescales set out below:

Description	Case Type	Target
Time from Report to Initial Inspection	All	Within 10 Working Days
Time from Initial Inspection to Start of Works	Low Risk Only	Within 10 Working Days, (with a follow-up monitoring call at weeks four, 12 and 24 after completion)
Time from Initial Inspection to Agreement of Schedule of Works	High Risk Only	Within five Working Days
Time from Agreement of Schedule of Works to Start of Works	High Risk Only	Within 10 Working Days or within the agreed timescale schedule for larger works
Time from Completion of Works to initial Follow-Up Visit	High Risk Only	Four Weeks (with a follow-up monitoring call at weeks 12 and 24)
Time from Initial Inspection to Start of Works	Recurring Cases	Within 21 Working Days or within the agreed timescale schedule for larger works (with a follow up monitoring call / visit where applicable at week four and follow-up calls at week 12 and 24)

**6.20.** It should be noted that in exceptional circumstances dependant on the extent of the investigatory / remediation works, it may take longer for works to complete. In such cases, the resident will be kept fully informed of the schedule of works.

**6.21.** Where possible the Council will work with tenants to arrange an appropriate time for works to be undertaken. However, given the seriousness that the Council places on dealing with damp, mould and condensation issues, there is an expectation that the tenant will be as flexible as possible to allow access to the property and for works to be undertaken within the timescales provided above.





## Summary of Key Steps for the Management of Damp, Mould and Condensation Cases

**6.22.** When we receive a report of damp, mould or condensation, or it is identified in another way such as through surveys, inspections or by others, we will always:

- Take seriously any reports of damp, mould and condensation; acting in a positive and respectful way to work with our tenants and leaseholders to find the best solution.
- Make an initial visit within 10 working days of a report being received, to carry out a damp and mould survey to assess the issue and escalate any Category 1 or 2 HHSRS hazards to the Operations Manager to be aware of and monitor.
- Record all details on the Council's Asset Management IT system to ensure full and transparent auditing and reporting of damp and mould cases and properties identified with Category 1 and 2 HHSRS hazards.
- Be objective when assessing damp, mould and condensation, considering structural factors that may be causing problems and commissioning specialist damp surveys when the cause of the issue is unclear.
- Provide useful and consistent advice to residents on what they can do to help minimise the potential for damp, mould and condensation in their property, while being sensitive to complicating factors such as fuel poverty.
- Communicate the results of all visits with residents, clearly explaining any identified actions.
- Carry out required repairs promptly and effectively (according to the timescales set out in xxx above),
- Invite resident feedback as part of our repairs monitoring and encourage residents to contact the Council again if the problem re-occurs.
- Ensure that residents know about the ways that they can complain if they are dissatisfied with the service they have received, as well as promoting the Housing Ombudsman as an impartial mediation service for them to use.

## 7. Dealing with Complaints and Disrepair Claims

**7.1.** We hope that by having robust arrangements in place to respond positively to reports of damp, mould, and condensation that we can deal effectively with any cases that arise and that residents will feel satisfied and reassured by our actions. Unfortunately, despite our best endeavours, it is possible that residents may still be dissatisfied about how we





have handled their report of damp, mould or condensation, perhaps because the range of works and measures we have carried out are not having the desired effect, or where the resident feels the action we have taken has not resolved the problem.

- 7.2.** If a resident feels we haven't dealt with matters satisfactorily, it is important they have access to the [Council's Complaints Policy](#) and that we deal with any complaints in line with the Complaint Handling Code, with clear compensation and redress guidance. Also, that remedies are commensurate to the distress and inconvenience caused, whilst recognising that each case is individual and should be considered on its own merits.
- 7.3.** It is therefore important that we identify more complex cases at the earliest stage and put in place a strategy for keeping residents informed about what we are doing to ensure effective resolution as soon as possible. These will usually be cases where we have sought to remedy the problems through the carrying out of works and have been working actively with the residents on other measures, but the problems persist.
- 7.4.** To try and get matters back on track, we will classify any report of damp and mould in respect of which a formal complaint is received, where the Housing Ombudsman becomes involved, or where a disrepair claim has been received as a 'serious case' and put in place a rigorous set of case management actions.
- 7.5.** These management actions will include:
  - Assign a Case Manager within the maintenance team who can work closely with a nominated officer in the Customer Care Team to progress and monitor actions.
  - Put in place a simple Communication Schedule for regular (weekly / fortnightly / monthly) phone calls or visits with the resident. The purpose of the plan is to schedule calls or visits, make a note of updates provided to the resident and information provided by the resident so a clear record and audit trail is kept.
  - Decide whether an independent, mutually agreed and suitably qualified surveyor should be used to carry out an investigation of the property and the damp / mould issues or identify and specify any repair or redecoration works that can and should be carried out.
  - If works are to be carried out, make sure these are done as quickly as possible, advising the resident of the timescales, and agreeing access to carry out the works.



- Recognise and act swiftly where there is a need to temporarily move out the resident / s and their household where either the nature of the works and / or vulnerabilities of the household members means this is the best course of action.
- Share the outcomes of all surveys and inspections with the resident to help them understand the findings and be clear on the next steps that are going to be taken.
- Act quickly and proactively on all accepted survey recommendations, carrying out the type of works needed as per our list for Stage 1 cases.
- Carry out a detailed inspection of any / all works carried out.

**7.6.** When the Council is satisfied that all the above steps have been carried out and that the problems have been satisfactorily resolved, we will write to the resident advising of this, stating that the Council will keep in touch to check on things as follows:

- After three months
- After six months
- After one year

This will be managed through the Task Management system currently being implemented within the Asset Management software program.

**7.7.** If, either because of the above check-ups or other communication from the resident, further actions or works are needed, these should be carried out the matters managed as a 'serious case', and information escalated to the Repairs Manager for monitoring.

**7.8.** Sometimes, ongoing problems with damp and mould may lead to residents lodging a disrepair claim. Once a claim is lodged, the next stages occur in accordance with the Pre-Action Protocol for Housing Condition Claims. If a legal disrepair claim is received, this must be immediately sent on to the Council's specialist legal services team for them to consider and advise. All requests and actions required by the legal services team must be dealt with and responded to promptly in the timescales specified. There is a pre-requisite pro- forma of information template currently in use which collects and collated all information needed for the legal team to act upon. All details will be provided by the dedicated surveyor.

**7.9.** As per Housing Ombudsman guidance, when a disrepair claim is issued, the Council will continue to do what it can to make repairs to remedy damp and mould issues and to respond to the associated formal complaint, even if the case is subject to the Pre-Action Protocol. This is because it is important to continue to use the Council's complaints procedure and 'serious case' actions even if any pre-action protocol has commenced and



until legal proceedings have been issued. This is to make sure we maximise the opportunities to resolve disputes outside of court and will ensure our approach is consistent with jurisdiction guidance. We will make sure our legal and Customer Care teams work together effectively where an issue is being pursued through the complaints process and protocol, seeking and taking their advice. Once any disrepair claim is raised, basic details will be escalated to the Head of Service to be aware of and become involved in claims where compensation values claimed exceed £2,000. These cases will also be reported on a monthly basis.

- 7.10.** Only once legal action has formally begun will the Council cease dealing with the complaint. The Housing Ombudsman considers that legal action begins upon the filing of the details of a claim in Court.

## **8. Monitoring and Accountability**

- 8.1.** Given the importance of us effectively dealing with and managing reports and cases of damp, mould and condensation, we will ensure we maintain an 'audit trail' of all our actions relating to all cases. We will also ensure we maintain up to date records that we will use to monitor and account to the Leadership Team, tenants' panel and to Councillors on the number and status of cases.
- 8.2.** Our arrangement for monitoring and accountability will comprise:
- Maintaining accurate and complete records of all our day-to-day repair reports and actions
  - Maintaining accurate and complete records of all 'recurring cases' of damp and mould, recognising that these have attended to on at least one previous occasion.
  - Ensuring full and proper recording of all cases that should be treated as a formal complaint, with full compliance with the Council's Complaints Policy
  - Including key metrics and status of all current and resolved damp and mould cases on our Compliance Dashboard, with reporting and monitoring of the dashboard to Leadership Team, tenants' panel and Councillors.

## 9. Continuous Improvement

### Learning from Past Cases

- 9.1.** We recognised the importance of using case and complaint data as opportunities for learning and improvement.
- 9.2.** To achieve this, we will:
- Review our range of preventative works programmes and initiatives on a regular basis, at least annually, to see if they remain relevant and effective.
  - Keep a dedicated tracker of live and historic damp, mould and condensation cases that will be regularly monitored and reviewed to identify themes, trends and learning opportunities from what has gone well, what has gone less well, the types or work and approaches that have the best results and so on.
  - Monitor and review complaints data to identify trends and highlight potential improvements to be made to the damp, mould and condensation process.

### Staff Training

- 9.3.** We are committed to ensuring that staff training supports our zero-tolerance approach to damp, mould and condensation.
- 9.4.** To do this, we will ensure that all customer service staff are trained in giving accurate initial advice to residents, as well as correctly escalating cases in accordance with the procedure.
- 9.5.** We aim to create a culture whereby all in-house and contractor staff have been appropriately trained and given a responsibility to look for the signs of damp, mould and condensation when visiting residents, even when the reason for their visit is unrelated. Staff will be provided with training appropriate to their role to give them confidence about doing this. All our in-house property team have full HHSRS accredited training and verified training in the identification and causes of damp and mould. This is to be included as a requirement within all new job descriptions within the service.

### Using Technology

- 9.6.** Understanding how we could make better use of technology is vital for improving our response to damp, mould and condensation.
- 9.7.** We will always ensure that relevant SCDC staff have the correct equipment (example, damp meters) to diagnose and assess damp, mould and condensation issues.



- 9.8.** We are investigating and trialling the use of the Asset Mobile for staff to record photographs and notes from visits, by answering pre-set questions. This will provide consistency in its response to damp, mould and condensation.
- 9.9.** We are also looking into the potential of smart in-home technologies like Switchee, Vericon and Aico environment sensors which would enable it to collect data on conditions within properties and identify properties at higher risk of damp, mould and condensation issues. We are also looking at temporary units for spot checks and individual claims where the causes are disputed by residents.

### Resident Engagement

- 9.10.** Tackling damp, mould and condensation is a team effort between Landlord and Tenant / Leaseholder. Therefore – in addition to remedying all cases of damp, mould and condensation in its properties, irrespective of cause – the Council is responsible for giving suitable and practical advice to residents on how they can help to prevent mould growth in their property after we have actioned issues, or before they arise. We will therefore ensure we provide residents with written and verbal advice that is consistent, accurate, and up to date.
- 9.11.** The Council's advice centres around three 'pillars' of mitigating condensation, and therefore mould: adequate ventilation, consistent temperature, and drying clothes correctly. However, our staff and contractors will be sensitive to individual circumstances when providing advice. For example, a lack of outside space makes it impossible to dry clothes outdoors, and the cost-of-living crisis may prevent many residents from heating their home adequately. This could lead to wider conversations about estates holistically and the provisions provided for the modern day living.
- 9.12.** In such cases, signposting to other council services – such as cost of living support – will be provided.

## 10. Responsibility and Review

- 10.1.** The Service Manager – Housing Assets is responsible for the review and implementation of this policy document, and its associated process.
- 10.2.** This policy was first published on 7 November 2023 and will be reviewed every year. The next review date is 7 November 2024. Through our resident engagement framework, tenants / leaseholders will be involved in future reviews of this policy.



## 11. Further Reading

Spotlight on Damp and Mould – Housing Ombudsman Report	<a href="https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Spotlight-report-Damp-and-mould-final.pdf">https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Spotlight-report-Damp-and-mould-final.pdf</a>
Pre-Action Protocol for Housing Conditions Claims (England)	<a href="https://www.justice.gov.uk/courts/procedure-rules/civil/protocol/prot_hou">https://www.justice.gov.uk/courts/procedure-rules/civil/protocol/prot_hou</a>
Regulator for Social Housing Website	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/regulator-of-social-housing">https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/regulator-of-social-housing</a>
Housing Ombudsman Website	<a href="https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/">https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/</a>
Decent Homes Standard	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-decent-home-definition-and-guidance">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-decent-home-definition-and-guidance</a>
South Cambs Website – Tenants’ Repairs and Improvements	<a href="https://www.scambs.gov.uk/housing/repairs/">https://www.scambs.gov.uk/housing/repairs/</a>