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**Slough Borough Council**

**Repairs, Maintenance & Investment Damp & Mould Policy**

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# Policy at a Glance

This policy has been developed to sit alongside and complement our Responsive Repairs and Voids procedures and provide a specific focus on ensuring the risk of damp and mould is best mitigated within Slough’s Housing Stock.

We want to do everything we reasonably can to make sure our residents stay safe, healthy and well in their homes. Damp and mould are issues which can have a serious impact on the health and well-being of our residents, and cause damage to homes.

This policy sets out our approach to dealing with damp and mould in our homes and communal areas. It covers how we manage and resolve damp & mould issues for our tenants and leaseholders.

# Welcome and Introduction

In October 2021, the Housing Ombudsman issued a “Spotlight on Damp and Mould”, highlighting the approach they expect social landlords to take when dealing with complaints about damp to them. The Housing Ombudsman has been adopting a more proactive approach to dealing with complaints and in line with Government direction is working much more closely with the Regulator for Social Housing in preparation for new legislation being brought by the Government based on the Social Housing White Paper.

We acknowledge that our Housing Stock is in varying degrees of age and condition and this can contribute to damp and mould issues within the dwellings, we have endeavoured to incorporate the needs to resolve damp and mould issues not only within our repairs and voids works but also through our planned improvements programmes.

**Policy Aims**

The aim of this policy is to ensure we achieve the following outcomes:

● Provide dry, safe homes for our residents which are free from any hazards.

● Comply with legislative, regulatory and contractual (including both tenancy and lease) obligations.

● Treat residents reporting damp and mould with empathy and respect; we will not prejudge the cause of the damp.

● Take responsibility for diagnosing and resolving damp and mould in a timely and effective way where the problem is a result from issues that require repair.

● Support residents on resolving damp and mould where they result from the use of the home, and provide our residents with appropriate, clear, sensitive, practical and accessible advice.

● Communicate with our residents clearly and regularly regarding any actions we plan to take and any actions our residents are advised to take concerning damp.

● Ensure staff are trained to enable them to spot potential causes of damp, mould and condensation so they can advise residents, diagnose problems and provide solutions.

● Make reasonable adjustments for people who have a disability and will take into account the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

Our staff and service providers will work together with our residents to deliver this policy.

The policy supports the delivery of the following strategic objectives:

* To be a customer focused organisation.
* To provide high quality and safe homes.
* To meet our legal and regulatory requirements.

# Scope of the policy

This policy applies to all HRA housing stock, James Elliman Homes and Temporary Accommodation which receive a repairs, maintenance and investment service.

# Types and Causes of Mould

Mould is a type of fungus. It spreads through spores, which are invisible to the naked eye but are in the air around us all of the time and can quickly grow on surfaces where dampness persists or water has formed, into a visible covering.

Dampness is basically an excess of moisture that can’t escape from a structure, which can result in significant damage to the dwelling.

There are four main causes of dampness in homes in England. It is important to understand the difference between them because they each need different solutions:

● **Water Leaks**: Often from defective supply and waste pipework (especially in bathrooms and kitchens) can affect both external and internal walls and ceilings. The affected area looks and feels damp to the touch and stays damp regardless of the prevailing weather conditions. It is the result of a problem or fault with the home, which requires repair. Who is responsible for the repair depends on where and why the leak happens.

● **Rising damp:** Is caused by water rising from the ground into the home. Water gets through or around a defective damp proof course (DPC) or passes through the masonry that was built without a DPC. Rising damp will only affect basements and ground floor rooms; it will be present all year round but can be more noticeable in winter. It is extremely uncommon but is generally the result of a problem or fault with the home, which requires repair.

● **Penetrating damp:** This appears because of a defect in the structure of the home, such as damaged brickwork, missing roof tiles, loose flashing or leaking rainwater goods. These defects allow water to pass from the outside to the floors, walls or ceilings. Penetrating damp is far more noticeable following a period of rainfall and will normally appear as a well-defined 'damp-patch' which looks and feels damp to the touch. It is the result of a problem or fault with the home, which requires a repair. Who is responsible for the repair depends on what the fault is and where it happens.

● **Condensation:** This the most prevalent type of dampness and is caused by moisture in the air (water vapour) inside the dwelling coming into contact with a colder surface, such as a window or wall. The drop in temperature causes liquid water to form on the surface and then soak in. It is usually found in kitchens, bathrooms, the corners of rooms, on north facing walls and on or near windows – all places that either tend to have a lot of moisture in the air, or to be cold generally. It is also found in areas of low air circulation such as behind wardrobes and beds, especially when they are pushed up against external walls.

All homes in England can be affected by condensation because the climate is often cool and wet. Normal household activities also constantly release moisture into the air. Good practice in the home minimises and alleviates condensation, and in many cases will prevent it causing dampness and persistent mould. However, on occasion the root cause can be a problem that requires a repair or an improvement to the home. In others, a different solution may be needed (for example, in cases of severe overcrowding).

**Preventative action**

As a pro-active measure, Slough wrote to all residents in April 2023 to enquire about the prevalence of damp and mould within their property. The response to this letter was that nearly 40% of the residents’ responded saying they had some form of damp & mould issue within the property. These issues ranged from very minor to severe.

The data from these responses and the subsequent working through of each the cases has helped identified where serious rectification works are required to estates or blocks which are now included within the planned improvement works.

All ongoing visits or inspections of properties from Technical Inspectors, Housing Officers or Service Provider staff will incorporate an assessment of the damp and mould within the property visited.

We will also seek to mitigate any increased risk of damp and mould arising as a result of our work to decarbonise our homes.

When a property becomes vacant, and prior to re-letting, we will seek to identify and remedy any issues which may cause damp. This may include ensuring doors and windows are serviceable and can effectively ventilate the property, ensuring extractor fans are working well, as well as applying mould treatments where necessary.

We will provide information on our website, and through other channels, to raise awareness about the causes of damp and mould. This will include details about how everyday activities in the home can generate condensation and what residents can do to help prevent damp through, for instance, ventilation, controlling the build-up of moisture and adequate heating. Where there is mould growth, we will provide advice on how this could be treated.

Our staff and service providers will have the skills and knowledge to identify signs of damp and mould and discuss with residents how to manage the problem. As above any staff will be encouraged to look out for signs whenever they visit a resident’s home.

In summary we will:

* Continue reviewing and pooling all knowledge of the Housing Stock between SBC and service partner staff to identify areas of the borough which are prone to damp and mould cases and pro-actively inspecting these properties.
* Review addresses which haven’t reported repairs and arranging visits to these properties to mitigate both damp and mould issues and disrepair issues.
* Ensure all Housing and service partner staff are fully aware of the seriousness and urgency in terms of managing these cases and understanding the process for managing these cases.
* Encourage all Housing Staff to pro-actively report any issues on tenancy verification and on any other visits made to the property.

# How we made this Policy

This policy was devised taking into account the data collated following the resident consultation exercise in April 2023, together with ad-hoc responsive repairs reporting. This has helped to formulate the policy required to tackle the scope of the damp and mould identified in the borough.

The collated information has enabled us to risk assess all reported cases of damp and mould and prioritise using consistent criteria.

The risk assessment will then inform next steps required for each case.

# Dealing with damp and mould

**Resident Responsibilities**

Residents are required to:

* Report any problems to us as soon as possible after noticing a problem.
* Report the issue by telephone or email.
* Go through a series of triage questions on the telephone with our call centre staff to determine the seriousness of the problem, if reported by telephone.
* Include photographs if possible, when reporting via email.

**Leaseholder Responsibilities:**

Leaseholders are required to:

* Report any problems to us as soon as possible after noticing a problem, which are believed to caused by an external issue.
* Go through a series of triage questions on the telephone with our call centre staff to determine the seriousness of the problem, if reported by telephone.
* Include photographs if possible, when reporting via email.
* Arrange any internal repairs privately as required under individual lease terms.

**Council Responsibilities**

Following receipt of a reported case of damp and mould, the council will:

* Arrange for a representative from our maintenance team or service provider to attend the property to investigate causes of damp and mould conditions, in order to consider the most appropriate remedial actions to take.
* Arrange a visit within 48 hours if the case has been triaged as severe from the initial report.
* Further diagnose the problem where the root cause is not immediately obvious, to determine whether it is due to a repair issue for which we are responsible. It is not always straightforward to find out what is causing damp and mould, as this could be due to a combination of factors, and a number of different measures may be necessary to resolve the issue.
* Arrange for any required repairs to be carried out in accordance with our Responsive Repairs Policy and its associated timescales.
* If required, instruct our service provider to commission a report from a specialist damp and mould surveyor.
* Work with our residents where damp is caused by condensation, to encourage them to take appropriate measures to prevent the damp and mould occurring. This may include advice about how to control moisture levels or increase ventilation or heating, so that damp levels are kept low. Where we provide such advice, it is important that residents adhere to it and do not take actions that could accentuate any problems e.g. by turning off ventilation systems or sealing over air vents.
* Fit environmental sensors throughout the property in some cases so we as the landlord and the resident themselves can monitor the levels of humidity and CO2 within the property. As well as ensuring every bathroom and kitchen has a modern extractor fan we will fit PIV (positive input ventilation) units into properties to improve the air flow and reduce condensation where this is deemed necessary.
* Arrange for a representative from our maintenance team to undertake a comprehensive risk assessment where there is a particularly severe or recurring damp or mould issue
* Take appropriate actions to support the resident, depending on the circumstance of the particular issue the resident faces.
* Keep residents informed of any property inspections, diagnosis of issues and the programming of works, where these are required. This includes explaining to them why work might be needed and what work might be done.
* Keep residents informed of any changes to the programme of works are needed
* Keep residents informed where work is not required, and we will explain the reason why no further work is needed and the steps they should take.

**Decants**

For more complex cases, and especially where more intrusive building work is required and/or there is a serious health risk to the resident or a member of their household, we may require residents to move out of their home. We will consider the individual circumstances of the resident, and ensure that appropriate checks are carried out at the property to ensure it is ready for the resident to return to.

**Access**

Our tenancy agreements require customers to allow us (including appointed service providers) access to their home to carry out works at the agreed appointment time. If we are unable to gain access and the integrity of the property, its fabric and/or the safety of the customer or those in the vicinity of the property is compromised, we will take appropriate action. For example, this may include, but is not limited to, obtaining an injunction for access.

**Claims**

Any claims for damages to belongings or personal injury will take account of our legal liability, our insurances and have reference to our Compensation Policy. Residents are advised to have their own contents insurance policy.6.

**Supporting our residents**

As stated previously, we will give residents advice on how to prevent damp and what they should do to remove mould. However, we recognise that not every resident will be able to resolve damp and mould themselves. We will provide appropriate support according to the specific circumstances and the individual customer’s needs.

We know that some residents struggle to afford to heat their homes adequately so we will work with them to ensure they are guided to all the help and support available from various funding initiatives.

1. **Next Steps**

Where damp and mould is found, we will consider a range of solutions which may include:

* Complete renewal of roof or windows incorporated into the planned maintenance schedule.
* Renewal of loft insulation
* Repairs to gutters/fascia
* Inspection and remedy to defective wall cavities
* Fitting thermal insulating plasterboard to internal areas.
* Fitting new extractor fans
* Fitting Positive air flow systems
* Fitting monitoring equipment.

It may be that we need to provide advice to the tenant about exploring other solutions which may be available, which may include finding alternative accommodation in the private sector and/or making an application to the housing register to move accommodation in line with the Allocations Policy.

Where a risk assessment has been carried out and it is found that we need to move the resident out to carry out repairs we may look to provide temporary accommodation on a short term basis. Where a resident needs a longer decant for the work to be completed, the resident will be offered accommodation on a like for like basis.

Following the closure of any damp and mould case a pro-active follow up 12 weeks after closure is scheduled to ensure no problems have re-occurred.

The damp and mould policy is governed by a contractual damp and mould sub group which meets monthly to discuss high priority cases, emerging issues and to monitor progress on all other damp and mould cases. This is supported by weekly reporting.

The damp and mould works are allocated a separate budget outside of responsive repairs. A majority of the budget is government grant funded.

1. **Monitoring & Measuring Success**

**Staff training**

We will ensure that all visiting staff (whether in house or our service providers) will have the required skills to diagnose and remedy damp and mould. We will ensure our staff are kept up to date with modern solutions and any new training available.

**Responding to complaints and learning lessons**

We aim to resolve complaints as quickly as possible without residents needing to resort to disrepair claims and legal action. Where legal action is taken, we will follow the Pre-Action Protocol for Housing Condition Claims so that we may resolve the dispute outside of court to help ensure issues are resolved quicker for customers.

We will learn lessons from damp and mould cases, update our technical approach and how we communicate with residents, in order to improve future responses.

**Subgroup Meetings**

Monthly damp and mould subgroup meetings will ensure consistent formal governance of damp and mould management in the borough through agreed terms of reference. This meeting is chaired by the SBC Repairs and Voids Manager.

**Measuring success**

Success will be measured through meeting expected response timescales, customer satisfaction gauged through regular customer surveys, a reduction in the number of outstanding cases, fewer new cases, a reduced number of reoccurrences of damp and mould due to the corrective action and mitigation measures applied to emerging damp and mould cases.

Reports will be shared quarterly with the Residents Board.

# Sources

**Key legal and regulatory references**

* Defective Premises Act 1972
* Environmental Protection Act 1990
* Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 (Section 11)
* Housing Act 2004 (Section 9 Housing, health and safety rating system [HHSRS])
* Decent Homes Standard 2006 • Equality Act 2010
* Home Standard, Regulator of Social Housing, 2015 out of date
* Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
* Pre-Action Protocol for Housing Conditions Claims (England), 2021
* Housing & Regeneration Act 2008
* Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023
* Consumer Standards 2024 (Safety & quality Standard; Transparency, Influence & Accountability Standard)

# Appendices

**Appendix 1** – Damp & Mould Process

**Appendix 2** – Damp & Mould Triage Criteria

**Appendix 3** – Damp & Mould Triage Flow Chart