

damp and mould policy

May 2023

1. Policy statement

- 1.1. believe housing is committed to ensuring the health and safety of our customers, staff and others who may be affected by damp, mould and condensation in homes that we own or manage.
- 1.2. We will ensure that the organisation's assets are protected and homes are fit for human habitation while ensuring customers live in a safe home.
- 1.3. The primary purpose of this policy is to ensure that all believe housing staff and customers are aware, understand and are equipped with information to deliver the requirements of our process in respect of issues relating to damp, mould and condensation.

2. Policy aims

- 2.1. This policy recognises that a successful service considers doing the right thing for believe housing's people, customers and business.
- 2.2. The policy is designed to meet the following aims:
 - Ensure that all customers live in a safe and habitable environment.
 - Comply with relevant statutory and regulatory obligations.
 - Provide clarity on our overall approach to damp, mould and condensation.
 - Ensure that we are delivering a consistent service to our customers.
 - Treat customers reporting damp and mould with respect and empathy and provide support where required.
 - Respond effectively to individual reports of damp and mould, focusing on identifying the cause to implement the right solution.
 - Ensure staff are appropriately trained.
 - Set out our proactive approach to deal with wider issues around damp, mould and condensation.
 - Provide assurance to our stakeholders that our approach to damp and mould is appropriate and effective.
 - Raise awareness with our people and our customers through targeted campaigns.
 - Interact with and listen to the feedback of customers to shape service delivery and customer experience.
 - Communicate with our customers who are involved in this process to ensure they are fully aware of the steps throughout and quickly respond if things go wrong.

3. Scope

- 3.1. This policy relates to all properties and communal areas owned and/or managed by believe housing.

4. Roles and responsibilities

- 4.1. The Assistant Director of Programme and Cyclical Delivery will have overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy.
- 4.2. As the approach to damp, mould and condensation is a collective organisational responsibility, the following areas of the business are responsible for different tasks:
- 4.3. The **Assets and Compliance Directorate** is responsible for undertaking stock condition surveys of properties to understand the condition and their investment needs. As part of this rolling programme of surveys, they will identify any hazards in relation to damp and mould under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).
- 4.4. Data from the surveys will be used to address any issues but also to proactively assess our homes, identify hot spots and specific areas of intervention to prevent any issues with damp, mould and condensation.
- 4.5. The **Property Repairs Directorate** is responsible for undertaking dedicated damp and mould surveys to properties by trained surveyors. In addition, they are responsible for accurately diagnosing and recording the issues and, where appropriate, implementing any actions to remedy the situation. This can include: carrying out major works or damp proof course (DPC) works; completing minor repair works; and offering guidance and support for customers, including how to operate systems within their home that will reduce the risk of damp, mould or condensation.
- 4.6. All works will comply and align with the Repairs and Maintenance Policy.
- 4.7. While our properties are empty, and in line with our 'voids lettable standard', the team is responsible for undertaking a damp and mould survey at inspection stage to identify any issues, carry out any necessary investigations and undertake remedial works before reletting a property.
- 4.8. The **Neighbourhoods and Customer Services Directorate** will take calls through the customer hub and report matters found on site. They will also ensure that the decant procedure is undertaken where required and support customers if they need to vacate their properties due to the severity of the risk or the extent of the works required to the property.
- 4.9. The **Corporate Strategy and Assurance Directorate** is responsible for responding to any complaints, claims and housing condition claims surrounding damp, mould and condensation. They will work closely with all other directorates to ensure we promptly and effectively address any issues, communicate with customers in relation to complaints and insurance claims, and analyse feedback to continuously improve our service delivery.
- 4.10. **believe housing staff** will follow the policy guidelines and its approach to damp, mould and condensation.

- 4.11. Frontline services are responsible for undertaking training in relation to damp, mould and condensation awareness and reporting any issues at the earliest opportunity.
- 4.12. **believe housing customers** are responsible for reporting any issues regarding damp, mould and condensation, and repairs that are the responsibility of believe housing as soon as reasonably possible. Customers are also responsible for taking on board any advice given by believe housing staff, ensuring the effective operation of any equipment installed at the property to improve the condition, and actioning any advice provided to them by believe housing staff. Customers are also required to provide access to their homes in accordance with their tenancy agreement.

5. Legislation and guidance

- 5.1. believe housing will deliver a service that complies with regulatory and statutory obligations to ensure the health, safety and security of people and property are maintained at all times.
- 5.2. The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) provides The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England from 2012 including 'The Home Standard'.
- 5.3. The key areas of legislation in this policy are:
- Defective Premises Act 1972 (Section 4)
 - Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
 - Building Regulations Act 1984
 - Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 (Section 11)
 - Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
 - Housing Act 2004
 - Housing Health and Safety Rating System 2006
 - Equality Act 2010
 - Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012
 - Data Protection Act 2018
 - Homes (Fit for Human Habitation) Act 2018

6. Definitions

- 6.1. **'Customer'** – Any tenant or leaseholder of a property or commercial unit owned and/or managed by believe housing.
- 6.2. **'Repair'** – The process of rectifying a component or installation when it is faulty or in a state of disrepair; in a believe housing owned and/or managed property.
- 6.3. **'Damp'** – Structural dampness is the presence of unwanted moisture in the structure of a building, either the result of intrusion from outside or condensation from within the structure.

- 6.4. **'Mould'** – Mould is a natural organic compound that develops in damp conditions and will only grow on damp surfaces. It is often noticeable and present in situations where condensation damp is present.

7. **Damp causes**

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

7.2. **Water leaks:**

From either a defective supply and waste pipework (especially in bathrooms and kitchens), which can affect both external and internal walls and ceilings, or through actions of our customers.

7.3. **Rising damp:**

Movement of moisture from the ground rising up through the structure of the building through capillary action.

7.4. **Penetrating damp:**

Water penetrating the exterior of a structure or internal leaks causing damage to the internal surfaces or structure.

7.5. **Condensation:**

Moisture held in warm air coming into contact with cold surfaces, subsequently condensing and causing water droplets.

8. **Reporting damp, mould and condensation**

- 8.1. Customers can report issues with damp, mould and condensation in a variety of ways:

- telephone
- email
- face to face
- website.

- 8.2. We encourage reporting through our Customer Hub to accurately diagnose any issues and gather as much information as necessary regarding property condition, customer profile and individual circumstances, such as vulnerabilities or medical needs.

9. **Property surveys**

- 9.1. All properties with reported issues relating to damp, mould and condensation will receive a dedicated property inspection (survey) by a trained member of staff.

- 9.2. There are two types of survey that are undertaken, a 'Type A' survey and a 'Type B' survey. Surveys are raised with the customer and booked in within 20 working days at their convenience.

- 9.3. All properties will initially receive a 'Type B' survey, unless deemed significant, which will warrant an immediate escalation to Type A. Type B surveys will be attended to by a trained Damp, Mould and Condensation (DMC) Technician, who will minimise any risks in the property by treating all visible mould and painting the affected area. They will also carry out an inspection of the property and, if required, remedial work will be raised following the visit.
- 9.4. A property may also be escalated to a 'Type A' survey at this stage, which consists of a more in-depth investigation by an accredited surveyor if the causation is not clear, issue is complex in nature, or a second opinion is required.
- 9.5. Any secondary reports of damp, mould or condensation will be referred to a 'Type A' survey by default.
- 9.6. All surveys will be carried out within 20 working days of them being raised unless deemed urgent and then these will be completed at the earliest opportunity inside this timescale.
- 9.7. For any priority cases, where we have evidence that a property is in a poor condition (such as through staff visits or councillor enquiries) or the nature of the tenancy for any reason warrants immediate attention, we will arrange an inspection as soon as possible with the customer.
- 9.8. All surveys will be followed up with a written report and filed for recordkeeping purposes.

10. Remedial actions

- 10.1. Following the property survey, there are a number of remedial actions that can be taken to alleviate any issues:
 - Advice and support offered to customers, such as fuel switching, ventilation methods.
 - Minor repairs to be raised, such as repairing extractor fans.
 - Major works to be raised, such as damp-proof courses.
- 10.2. The works will be completed within the timescales set out in the repairs policy.

11. No access

- 11.1. Where the operative visits a property and no one is at home, the operative will try to contact the customer on the number provided. If contact cannot be made, a no access calling card will be left at the property. The card will indicate the reason for the call and a contact number for the customer to make a new appointment.
- 11.2. For a survey or remedial works relating to damp and mould, the operative will use the contact details on the works order and telephone the customer. If the operative does not gain access, the repair will remain open to allow time to make contact and rebook the repair. We will make reasonable endeavours to gain access to carry out required inspections and work.

11.3. All of our no access appointments will be consumed as a no access SOR in QL.

12. Decants

12.1. Depending on the diagnosis, complexity, and scale of the works, it may be identified it is in the best interests of the customer for us to follow our organisational decant procedure.

12.2. All customers will be supported by Property Experience Coordinators and Neighbourhood Management staff if this is required.

13. Quality inspection and follow-up visits

13.1. We exercise a quality inspection process of the work we have carried out. We carry out inspections after all of our major works and any minor repairs are inspected as part of our repairs quality assurance process.

13.2. Four weeks after any remedial works have been completed, we will contact the customer to ensure they are satisfied with the works and that there are no further works outstanding.

13.3. Following this, a six-month contact is raised with the customer, to ensure any issues have been fully remedied and the interventions have been successful.

13.4. If any issues remain, we will undertake a 'Type A' survey by our accredited surveyor.

13.5. All customers are also encouraged to report any changes to their property at any time.

14. Staff training and awareness

14.1. Surveyors are trained and accredited through the CSTDB, achieving the status of Certificated Surveyor of Dampness in Buildings. These surveyors carry out our 'Type A' surveys.

14.2. All frontline staff, including trade operatives, are trained on damp, mould, and condensation awareness.

15. Customer experience and support

15.1. Customer awareness and experience in relation to damp and mould has been shaped through feedback from staff and customers, and research across the sector.

15.2. Every customer and every case is treated on an individual basis. Follow-on work can be prioritised due to a customer's vulnerabilities, which will be identified on a 'Type A' survey.

15.3. Dedicated Property Experience Coordinators are assigned to complex cases to support customers before, during and after property inspections and remedial works.

- 15.4. A suite of self-help videos is available for customers, to aid awareness and provide information on ways to identify damp, mould and condensation, and how to prevent issues from occurring.
- 15.5. The believe housing website has a dedicated page to enable customers to search for information on damp, mould and condensation, literature, support and advice, self-help and how to contact us.

16. Individual circumstances

- 16.1. believe housing appreciates and embraces the diversity of customers and there will be occasions where services will need to be tailored to accommodate individuals and their needs. Every attempt will be made to identify any individual circumstances at first point of contact to ensure reasonable adjustments can be made.

17. Data and trends

- 17.1. All properties with recorded instances of damp, mould or condensation will be logged alongside any diagnostic information collected. This information will be used to identify trends and drive a proactive approach to prevention and remediation.
- 17.2. Wherever we have identified 10% or more homes in a location with instances of damp, mould or condensation, we will carry out proactive surveys and use this data to target our resources.

18. Asset management

- 18.1. Should a property defect be identified through surveys that either is currently recurring or is likely to recur within other homes, works will be identified and carried out as a planned programme. This ensures a proactive approach to tackling defects that may result in damp, mould or condensation in the future.
- 18.2. The believe housing specification will be reviewed on a quarterly basis and updated regularly to include measures that support the reduction in damp, mould and condensation. This ensures that even where no damp, mould or condensation has been identified, our planned programmes support our policy objectives.

19. Proactive and preventative measures

- 19.1. We will continue to trial the use of Internet of Things (IOT) in preventing damp, mould and condensation. This includes dashboard alerts for high humidity and low temperatures.
- 19.2. Customer sentiment to the use of this technology will be considered at all times and customers will be made aware at relet that monitoring equipment is present in their homes.
- 19.3. believe housing will put in place support for those struggling to heat their homes.

20. Performance and customer satisfaction

- 20.1. To measure and monitor our effectiveness and to provide assurance we have a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that are measured and reported:
- Number of surveys raised and appointed.
 - Number of completed surveys.
 - Timescale for surveys.
 - Number of remedial works raised and appointed.
 - Number of completed remedial works.
 - Timescales for remedial works.
 - Quality assurance.
 - Customer satisfaction.
- 20.2. Performance will be reported to the Executive Management Team and Audit and Risk Committee.
- 20.3. Customer satisfaction testing will be conducted regularly on a random selection of properties where works have been carried out. This will be in conjunction with the six monthly follow up contacts.
- 20.4. Feedback and analysis will be used to identify trends and to continuously improve service delivery.

21. Complaints, claims and lessons learned

- 21.1. We aim to resolve complaints as quickly as possible without customers needing to resort to disrepair claims and legal action. Where a customer makes a complaint relating to damp and mould, we will highlight this with the Property Repairs Team at the earliest opportunity so that we can assess the current situation and put any actions in place while then carrying out the wider investigation.
- 21.2. Where legal action is taken, we will follow the Pre-Action Protocol for Housing Conditions Claims so that we may resolve the dispute outside of court to help ensure issues are resolved quicker for customers.
- 21.3. When we receive a Public Liability claim, which has been made against the business, the Business Risk and Assurance Team will notify the Diagnostics Team at the earliest opportunity to ensure they are aware of the address in question. If damages are under £5,000, the claim will be investigated in-house. If damages are over £5,000, or where the claim references personal injury, this will then be processed by insurers. If liability is accepted following a full investigation the claim will be settled and closed. It should be noted that personal injury claims can take considerable time to be concluded, these timeframes are claim specific and outside of believe housing's control. If further damage is identified the claim will be re-opened.

- 21.4. We will learn lessons from damp and mould cases, and continually review our procedures and processes and how we communicate with residents, in order to improve future responses.

22. Monitoring and review

- 22.1. This policy will be reviewed every three years unless there is a significant incident, or important change in circumstances or legislation, which would warrant a review being carried out at an earlier date.

23. Links to other policies and procedures

- 23.1. This document should also be read in conjunction with:
- Asbestos Management Policy
 - Complaints Policy
 - Decant Procedure
 - Health and Safety Policy and procedures
 - Housing Ombudsman Spotlight Gap Analysis
 - Repairs and Maintenance Policy and procedures
 - Tenancy Agreement Terms and Conditions
 - Void Procedure.