



Name of meeting: Cabinet

Date: 23 January 2024

Title of report: Damp, Mould and Condensation

Purpose of report: To inform Cabinet of the situation with damp, mould and condensation in Council Homes as at the end of October 2023, actions taken to date to respond and next steps for change and improvement to approach.

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| Key Decision - Is it likely to result in spending or saving £500k or more, or to have a significant effect on two or more electoral wards? Decisions having a particularly significant effect on a single ward may also be treated as if they were key decisions. | Not Applicable |
| Key Decision - Is it in the <u>Council's Forward Plan (key decisions and private reports)</u>? | Key Decision: No Private Report/Private Appendix: No |
| The Decision - Is it eligible for call in by Scrutiny? | Yes |
| Date signed off by <u>Strategic Director</u> & name | David Shepherd 29 November 2023 |
| Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance? | Isabel Britten 11 January 2024 |
| Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning? | Julie Muscroft 11 January 2024 |
| Cabinet member portfolio | Councillor Moses Crook Housing and Highways |

Electoral wards affected: All

Ward councillors consulted: No

Public or private: Public

Has GDPR been considered? GDPR has been considered and there are no issues arising.

1. Summary

- 1.1. The Economic and Consumer Standards issued by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) set out the statutory requirements for landlords to adhere to. The Home Standard deals with the quality of accommodation and repairs and maintenance and includes requirements that landlords must:
 - ensure homes meet the standards in the Governments Decent Homes Guidance
 - provide a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service that responds to the needs of, and offer choices to, tenants and aims to complete work right first time.
 - meet all applicable statutory requirements relating to the health and safety of residents.
 - ensure a prudent, planned approach to repairs and maintenance, demonstrating an appropriate balance of planned and responsive repairs and value for money.
- 1.2. The Decent Homes Guidance includes requirements that homes provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort and be free from category 1 hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). The HHSRS covers 29 potential housing related hazards including damp and mould growth and excessive cold as well as the household type. If the property has adequate heating, ventilation, insulation and extraction and no ingress of water and these facilities are not being used by the resident then no hazard exists, but remedial action can still be taken by the council.
- 1.3. The council is in regular contact with the RSH, and they have been informed and updated about the levels of damp, mould and condensation cases since July 2023.
- 1.4. In November and December 2022, a rapid review of the council's approach to damp, mould and condensation was undertaken. The rapid review and action plan identified three main areas for improvement, communication, data and intelligence and process. In January 2023 a task and finish group was formed to deliver changes to the short-term approach to damp, mould and condensation and to redesign processes in place for the longer term.
- 1.5. Job volumes for damp, mould and condensation over winter 2022 were at double the level of the winter period for 2021, 50% higher over summer 2023 than in 2022 and since September 2023 have been rising at around double the rate of the same period last year. The number of damp, mould and condensation cases is likely to remain high for some time because of the condition and age of properties and the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis which means that residents aren't always able to heat their homes. The new processes in place to respond to damp, mould and condensation cases will support the resolution of immediate issues and symptoms, ensuring the protection of tenants' health and wellbeing. However, long term resolution will be reliant upon larger scale capital investment to deal with the root causes of problems. An Asset Strategy for 2024 – 2029 has been produced along with investment plans to underpin delivery of the actions in the strategy. The

Strategy and investment plans will be presented to Cabinet in March 2024 to seek approval for adoption and delivery and will form part of the budget setting for the HRA.

- 1.6. Damp, mould and condensation is on the corporate risk register and updates are provided regularly. The current level of cases and progress in resolving the backlog means that to reduce the level of risk, continued, concerted work to manage service delivery and review and improve the approach being taken is essential.
- 1.7. This report provides an update on the delivery of changes to the approach to damp, mould and condensation and sets out the situation in Council homes as at the end of October.

2. Information required to take a decision

2.1. Progress to date

- 2.1.1. A dedicated IT system for damp, mould and condensation cases was implemented in February 2023 and a single point of contact (SPoC) was established in April 2023.
- 2.1.2. Officers from the SPoC, Kirklees Direct, Housing Management and Assets have contacted 1,342 residents with an open damp and mould case to get up to date information on the state of the home, any vulnerabilities in the household and any other relevant information to support prioritisation and response. There are 105 residents (7.8% of open cases) that the council has been unable to make contact with following three calls and two letters where in-person visits are ongoing. The SPoC, Housing Management and Assets teams continue to provide support to residents with open cases.
- 2.1.3. The IT system continues to be improved to support better management of cases and new ways of working. The complaints system is being updated to enable damp, mould, and condensation cases to be referenced in a way that aligns with the referencing in the dedicated system. Once this is complete an interface with the dedicated system will be provided. In October 2023 enhancements were made within the damp and mould diagnostic of the housing repairs system. Additional information is now captured to help with early diagnosis and residents are able to upload photographs. Case management is now being developed within the system to reduce the need for manual inputting of data into spreadsheets. The system prevents duplicate jobs from being raised and instead signposts residents to the SPoC Team who can provide advice and arrange for the existing job to be re-prioritised as required.
- 2.1.4. Up until the end of September mould treatments were delivered by an external contractor. Jobs were raised with the contractor who carried out surveys and treatments and then provided recommendations for further actions back to the Council. These recommendations included identification of structural damp, the need for additional ventilation and repairs required. This approach had been in place since 2019, the expiry of the contract at the end of September meant that changes to the delivery model to provide earlier diagnosis could be made more easily. Under the previous approach it was taking between 6

weeks and 3 months for an initial visit to be carried out and diagnosis made; initial diagnosis is now carried out within 48 hours of receipt of a case.

- 2.1.5. A decorating team in Property Services was put in place in March 2023. The capacity in this team has gradually increased and jobs are currently being completed at an average rate of 38 per week, an increase from 12 a week at the outset.
- 2.1.6. A new contractor has been procured to deliver mould treatments; they are primarily focussed on clearing the backlog of jobs but will also provide additional capacity for new cases. The contractor will deliver a minimum of 60 treatments per week (subject to access). The new contract commenced on 30 October and the contractor is now contacting residents to arrange visits and has commenced visits from 13 November 2023.
- 2.1.7. Since July a new approach to diagnosis and triage has been in operation. This has helped to improve understanding of issues and the response required. Backlog cases have all been triaged and prioritised for action. This model has been developed and since the beginning of October a dedicated technical triage team has been in place. Surveyor visits to homes have been ongoing since July to support management of cases. The Triage Team assess the information provided via the online form, identify whether there are any repairs required to fix the cause, assess mould treatment needs and schedule surveyor visits for more complex cases. They aim to contact the resident within two working days to inform them of the next steps and timescales. This approach has helped to identify non genuine damp and mould jobs where resident specific advice can be provided instead, thereby reducing waiting time for genuine damp and mould treatment cases. Feedback received from residents about the new approach has been very positive.
- 2.1.8. Other operational improvements have been made to no-access visits and grouping of works to ensure cases are properly followed up and managed to resolution.
- 2.1.9. Before the close of 2023/24 cavity wall insulation will be installed or replaced in 30 homes. In 2024/25 95 homes will have cavity wall insulation installed or replaced and 124 homes will have loft insulation installed. Homes included in this programme have been identified through Green Doctor visits, damp, mould and condensation cases, complaints, and SAP bandings.
- 2.1.10. Work to develop service standards for ventilation established that the time from identifying fan installation requirements to completing the work was protracted by the approach taken to diagnosis in past delivery. The new triage team is identifying the need for ventilation at the earliest possible stage and a rolling programme of fan installations has now been agreed. A programme of servicing for ventilation has been developed and will commence in 2024/25.
- 2.1.11. A leaflet has been made available to residents on the website and in community hubs to aid identification of damp, mould, and condensation

issues and to encourage them to report these to the Council. A short film has also been developed to provide this information and will be added to the page on the council's website where residents can also access short films on the other 'big six' areas of compliance.

- 2.1.12. A link to the video will be sent by text to those residents we have a valid mobile number for. The materials left with residents following a mould treatment visit have been redesigned to support them in reducing the likelihood and impact of condensation where this is something they are able to influence and to ensure they know when and how to escalate and report issues to the Council. In November an article will be published in the tenant magazine which will include tips on how to reduce condensation and when and how to report it.
- 2.1.13. E-learning on damp, mould and condensation has been rolled out and is mandatory for officers in Homes and Neighbourhoods and has been recommended for completion for all officers who speak with or visit residents in their home. Take-up has been good, with 531 officers in the Council having completed the training, 457 of whom work in Homes and Neighbourhoods, and we are now working with partners in health and safeguarding who are keen to access the training.
- 2.1.14. As the action plan has been delivered, the tasks carried out have responded to the changing situation and need. The current plan includes for regular review of the new service delivery model and delivering improvements identified. The current plan is also heavily focussed on data and intelligence, looking at the integration of other relevant datasets and how damp, mould and condensation information can be incorporated into capital programme development.
- 2.1.15. A new Asset Strategy has been drafted and is on a flightpath for Cabinet in March 2024. This strategy sets out priorities and pledges and includes a commitment that within 2 years we will have developed and implemented policies and procedures to manage disrepair, damp, mould, and condensation effectively. The Strategy will help to support a holistic, data-led approach to asset management and to ensuring that the root causes of issues such as damp, mould and condensation are addressed by taking a worst-first and fabric-first approach to investment.
- 2.1.16. Along with the Asset Strategy analysis of the investment needs of homes has been undertaken and new 5, 10 and 30 year capital plans developed. These plans make provision for improvement of homes through worst-first component replacement and investment in fabric-first retrofit. These works will help to improve the energy efficiency, ventilation, air-tightness and condition of homes supporting a reduction in the underlying causes of damp, mould and condensation. Over the next two years up to date stock condition data will be collected and used, along with repairs and other data on the condition of homes, to carry out option appraisals and develop these investment programmes further to target damp, mould and condensation and support achievement of The Home Standard.

2.2. Case volumes

2.2.1. Since December 2022 we have resolved and closed 1,606 damp, mould, and condensation cases.

2.2.2. As at the end of October there were 1,604 open cases with an additional 149 cases that are open in the system, where works have been completed and the jobs need closing. The new approach to diagnosis enables a more detailed breakdown of open cases as shown in the table below. No Category 1 or 2 HHSRS hazards have been identified in the open cases. Cases are rated as high risk when they are over 90 days old or where there is a vulnerable resident in the household (no matter the age of the case). Medium risk cases are those between 29 and 90 days old and low risk are those up to 28 days old.

| Case status/ type | Count of jobs | High | Medium | Low |
|---|---------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| Awaiting triage/ triage in progress | 120 | 49 | 0 | 71 |
| Mould treatment only | 588 | 387 | 172 | 29 |
| Repair/ improvement only | 139 | 137 | 0 | 2 |
| Repair/ improvement with mould treatment | 340 | 303 | 12 | 25 |
| Technical visit | 155 | 148 | 3 | 4 |
| Letter/ visit to tenant required. All have had three calls, two letters and homes are now being visited to enable assessment and follow-up. | 105 | 105 | 0 | 0 |
| Other - duplicates (56), communal repairs, new voids and ones that sit within other processes such as disrepair (50) or complaints. | 157 | 143 | 6 | 8 |
| TOTAL | 1604 | 1272 | 193 | 139 |

| Age of job (days) | Count of jobs | High | Medium | Low |
|---------------------|---------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| 1-28 Days | 296 | 151 | 6 | 139 |
| 29 Days to 3 Months | 315 | 128 | 187 | |
| 3-6 Months | 175 | 175 | | |
| 6-12 Months | 696 | 696 | | |
| 12-18 Months | 83 | 83 | | |
| 18+ Months | 39 | 39 | | |
| TOTAL | 1604 | 1272 | 193 | 139 |

Since these figures were produced as at the end of October, the number of cases awaiting triage has reduced and cases are being dealt with promptly. A

Team Leader and Quality Liaison Officer are reviewing capacity and productivity in the triage team to ensure prompt diagnosis of issues. An exercise is ongoing to transfer case notes on duplicate jobs into a single record before the jobs are closed. At the same time, these notes are reviewed to assess whether the priority of the work or the actions needed should change.

- 2.2.3. The number of outstanding cases as at the beginning of October was still high and as such the resolution of the backlog through the new contractor is being closely managed to ensure the rate of a minimum of 60 jobs per week is achieved and where it is not, to take action to support improvements. If the contractor performs well then in early January, discussions will be held about them taking on new cases in addition to the backlog.
- 2.2.4. As stated at 1.5 case volumes continue to rise at around double the rate of last year and last winters rates were double those of the previous year. The increase in cases and the level of outstanding jobs can be attributed to a number of factors including raised awareness, the condition of homes, the capacity for delivering mould treatments and the previous service delivery model.
- 2.2.5. Based on the triage outcome work is packaged and order from the appropriate contractor and jobs are prioritised based on the age of the job and the vulnerability of the resident. Urgent cases have been fast-tracked to assess risk. In homes where both a repair and mould treatment are required, cases are dealt with by Property Services and managed so that works are undertaken in the right order. Repair only cases are also dealt with by Property Services through normal repair processes. Mould treatment cases are dealt with by Property Services and the new contractor.
- 2.2.6. The new contractor has taken on 464 backlog cases, and these should be completed by the end of January 2024, subject to access. There are processes in place with the new contractor that replicate those with Property Services to improve the likelihood of access being gained and to report back promptly following visits, particularly where wider or more serious issues are identified. Officers in the SPoC and Triage teams have access to contractor data to support resident communication and case management.
- 2.2.7. The Team Leader in the triage team is responsible for the contract management of the new mould treatment contractor and will also ensure that the team are monitoring delivery and resolution of cases. This monitoring will review productivity for in-house and externally delivered treatments against new cases received and totals outstanding and direct capacity to support resolution in a timely manner.
- 2.2.8. Since the last report 22 complaints relating to damp, mould and condensation have been received (period 2 August to 31 October 2023). 15 of these were resolved at Stage 1, 2 were resolved at Stage 2 and 5 are currently being dealt with at Stage 1. The majority of complaints relate to the waiting time for a mould treatment to be undertaken.

2.2.9. There are 21 specialist (structural) damp jobs being delivered at present, with another 20 awaiting a survey. 3 specialist jobs have been completed since August and 6 new cases have been received. Specialist works are currently taking longer to complete as there is no contract in place for this work and three quotes are being sought for each job. The development of requirements and documentation for the re-procurement of contractors to deliver specialist works is ongoing and tenders will be issued in January 2024.

2.2.10. Cases requiring decant are taken to the Decant Panel where they are matched with any available properties which meet their requirements. Where more than one household is competing for the same property, then the panel assess which is the priority household based on health and safety and health and wellbeing. Panel members are made up of technical officers and officers from housing management who are familiar with the cases being presented. There are currently 46 households awaiting decant of which 43 relate to specialist works mainly related to damp. Of the households requiring a decant 22 have accepted a property, 2 are in a legal process, 1 is on hold as the tenant is currently unable to move and Housing Management liaise with the tenant at least monthly on progress, 7 are being re-surveyed, the remaining 11 continue to be considered at decant panel on a weekly basis. At the time of the previous report in August, the oldest case awaiting a decant for damp, mould and condensation was 3 years old. Work to cross check all records on decants requirements has resulted in a 4-year-old case being identified. This case was put forward to the decant panel and a matching property was found and accepted by the household in September. The oldest decant case awaiting a property to be allocated is from May 2023, the tenant accepted a property in September and then declined it a month later. This case will continue to be tabled at Decant Panel until a suitable property is found.

2.2.11. As at 03/11/23 there are currently 660 live housing conditions (disrepair) claims. Of these 48 have live court proceedings, 65 have been determined at trial or pre-trial and 547 are cases where we have received a letter of claim from solicitors acting for the tenant(s) where the claim is still live, either awaiting issuing of court proceedings or because housing conditions claims (disrepair cases) remain open for 6 years following the issuing of a letter of claim.

2.2.12. Under the new approach introduced in October 2023, when new damp, mould and condensation cases are received, a check is made for live housing condition claims at the same address. Where there is a live housing condition claim, the case is passed to the surveyor dealing with the claim and they escalate any survey or repair visits required. The case is monitored as part of the claim process and also as part of the management of damp, mould and condensation cases to ensure an adequate, timely response.

3. Implications for the Council

3.1 Working with People

3.1.1 This work will improve the living conditions and safety of tenants and residents. The principles created for the redesign work put customer experience first and aim to design processes and approaches that ensure residents receive a high-quality service which resolves issues promptly and fully. Resident and member involvement in the redesign is key to creating a service offer that addresses their everyday issues and concerns and provides safe homes.

3.2 Working with Partners

3.2.1 Connections with partners are in place and growing. Work with Public Health and the CCG as part of an asthma pilot is ongoing and has resulted in a small number of referrals for remedial works and treatments. The result of this change in process and the impact on residents are being assessed. Training is being made available to partners through other health and safeguarding partnerships and integrated reporting pathways are being developed.

3.3 Place Based Working

3.3.1 This work is moving the delivery of reactive and proactive responses to mould, damp and condensation and the underlying causes to one that is intelligence led. It embeds learning to support continuous improvement and will involve members and residents.

3.4 Climate Change and Air Quality

3.4.1 Works carried out to homes will have a climate impact through the removal of existing construction components and materials and the provision of new. The carbon footprint of activity is not yet understood. Once new delivery models are embedded, and case numbers have stabilised methods to measure climate impact will be developed.

3.5 Improving outcomes for children

3.5.1 For children living in homes affected by the works their safety and living conditions will be improved. This should in turn lead to better physical and mental health.

3.6 Financial Implications

3.6.1 Works that improve the fabric of homes (such as insulation provision or renewal) should improve thermal performance and help residents to keep their homes warm at a lower cost. The forecast cost of dealing with damp, mould, and condensation for 2023-24 is £2m. This budget was increased in year from £1m and has been provided to deal with existing and known cases and to deal with any ongoing reported cases. This has been funded from an overspend to the repairs and maintenance budget, which has been offset by a forecast underspend for management costs and from additional investment income. A budget of £2m will be provided for damp, mould, and condensation for the next three years from 2024-25 onwards. This has been modelled through the HRA business plan and is affordable.

3.7 Other (eg Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)/Legal/Financial or Human Resources) Consultees and their opinions

3.7.1 A Stage 1 IIA was completed for the new approach to service delivery in June 2023. The proposals have a positive effect on people and equalities and a neutral effect on the environment.

ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

| Theme | Calculated Scores | | | | | | Stage 2 Assessment Required |
|-------------|-------------------|--------|-------|------------|----------|-------|-----------------------------|
| | Proposal | Impact | P + I | Mitigation | Evidence | M + E | |
| Equalities | 6 | 3.5 | 9.5 | 0 | 2 | 2 | No |
| Environment | | 4.1 | 4.1 | 5 | 2 | 7 | No |

3.7.2 The costs of providing mould treatments have increased considerably in 2023/24 against previous years, this is largely due to the increase in cases and for some backlog cases, the scale and extent of the treatment required. Budget requirements for 2024/25 are being reviewed in the light of current case volumes and the new approach to case management. A longer-term approach that looks to deal with the root causes of issues, rather than symptoms will help to reduce revenue spend associate with mould treatments.

3.7.3 The costs from disrepair cases are high, these costs include settlement amounts, the cost of repairs dealt with when disrepairs are notified, legal fees and operational costs of managing casework. Cases are managed to minimise unnecessary costs – e.g. making settlement or reparation without going to court where the council is clearly responsible for the works required. The most effective way to reduce costs in relation to disrepair is to reduce its incidence through better diagnosis and management of repairs and other works. The service improvement changes which are being delivered by H&N will help to facilitate this shift, but it will take some time for the impact of this to manifest.

4. Consultation and Engagement

4.1 The redesign of damp, mould and condensation processes were developed through engagement with residents about their experience of the service provided. New processes have been developed to be more resident focussed and aim to improve communication and resident experience. Feedback received from residents who have reported cases since the new service delivery model was introduced has been largely positive and shows that the redesign is improving resident experience.

4.2 The new service delivery model includes follow-ups with residents immediately post-completion to gauge their satisfaction with the way the case was dealt with and again at 3 months to check that the treatment has worked, and the problem has not recurred. Learning from this activity is fed back into the design of the model on an ongoing basis.

4.3 A more substantial review of the success of the new model, involving residents and members will take place after 6 months of operation. The review will look to understand the most important Key Performance Indicators for stakeholders, implement these if they are not already in place so they can inform the management and future redesign of services.

5. Next steps and timelines

- 5.1 An internal audit of damp, mould and condensation will take place and any recommendations implemented.
- 5.2 Treatments, repairs, and other required actions will be delivered for backlog and new cases. These will be managed and monitored by the SPoC and Triage teams to ensure adequate and appropriate resolution and resourcing.
- 5.3 The new service delivery model will be reviewed and improved on an ongoing basis with a more formal and comprehensive review after 6 months of operation.
- 5.4 Strategy, service standards and the use of data and intelligence to support improvements to service delivery will be developed and implemented over the next 12 months.
- 5.5 The Asset Strategy and 30-year capital plan will be submitted to Cabinet in March 2024 for approval and adoption.

6. Officer recommendations and reasons

- 6.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - 6.1.1 Note the contents of this report and the status of the delivery of services to residents in relation to damp, mould, and condensation.
 - 6.1.2 Receive regular updates on progress with the design and delivery of changes to the approach to damp, mould, and condensation.
 - 6.1.3 Receive regular updates on the situation with damp, mould, and condensation in residents' homes.

7. Cabinet Portfolio Holder

- 7.1 The report was presented to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Highways on 28 November 2023.

8. Homes and Neighbourhoods Improvement Board recommendations

- 8.1 The report was presented to Homes and Neighbourhoods Improvement Board on 16 November 2023. The Board recognised how much had been achieved through the project and the improvements this has brought. Board asked for regular updates on the volume of damp, mould, and condensation cases especially through the winter months.

9. Contact officer

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10. Background Papers and History of Decisions
[DMC Update Cab Aug23 v1.1.pdf \(kirklees.gov.uk\)](#)

11. Service Director responsible
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