

APPENDIX 1

Denbighshire Response to Welsh Government Letter regarding Damp & Mould (dated 15th December 2022)

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20th January 2023 (Updated 27th February 2023 for Performance Scrutiny
Committee)

Introduction

This report is written in response to the letter from Welsh Government, dated 15th December 2022 regarding damp and condensation. This report will also form the basis of a report to the Council's relevant Scrutiny Committee.

The key questions raised in the WG letter are:

We need you to tell us, in relation to damp and mould issues:

- Whether you have carried out a review of this nature in recent weeks and if not, why not.
 - If you have carried out a review, what did the review tell you?
 - If there are any damp and mould cases which are not being dealt with effectively, what is the scale of this and what are your plans for remediation?
 - Explain the data you hold in relation to damp and mould, including the level of stock coverage and how often the data is scrutinised and refreshed.
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- Explain the assurance the governing body has scrutinised to give them confidence the organisations' systems and processes are the best they can be and do not discriminate in any way, to ensure damp and mould issues are dealt with promptly and effectively.

Think Point 9

Social landlords should ensure measures are in place to specifically identify and address reported issues with damp and mould. This should include investigation/inspections by default, ensuring condensation and its causes are accurately diagnosed, rectifying any defects as promptly as possible and supporting tenants with help and advice, including fuel poverty.

1. REVIEW OF DAMP AND MOULD ISSUES

In November 2022, Denbighshire Housing (part of Denbighshire County Council) reviewed our approach to managing mould and condensation issues.

We have been proactive over previous Autumn / Winter periods in providing advice and support to our households about condensation. This has included regular newsletter and social media articles on how to reduce and manage condensation and also regular information to raise awareness of our partnership to deliver advice and support from Citizen Advice Denbighshire who are able to support with household finances but also specifically about energy bills and tariffs.

TPAS Cymru has used Denbighshire as an example of good practice regarding communicating to tenants about damp and condensation.

Following the Awaab Ishak case we have reviewed our approach to how we manage reports from tenants about damp, mould and condensation.

This includes reviewing our documentation and we have created a simplified checklist to accompany our information leaflet on managing condensation.

This checklist is attached as appendix 2.

The checklist outlines what we must do for the household when dealing with mould and condensation but also gives a list of actions for households to help raise awareness of a joint approach to ensure mould does not appear and become a health risk to the household. This is not intended to blame the household but to advise that condensation has to be managed and we want to deliver a supportive joint approach to the issue.

Prior to the news about Awaab we had already arranged a series of mandatory briefing sessions for our Housing and Property teams on the risks we face this winter due to the cost of living crisis. This focused particularly on the impact of significantly increased energy costs on households which will increase the risks we are already aware of during the winter months. We understand that the attitude of our staff and our culture of supporting tenants is as important as procedures and processes.

The news about Awaab broke in the days before the sessions so they became more focused on the issue with mould and condensation. The purpose of the sessions was to raise awareness of 4 heightened issues –

- **Household finances** – the impact that increased heating costs will have on households and for staff to be aware of any comments about difficulty with heating their home or feeding their family for example and the support we can offer
- **Mould and condensation** – we launched the checklist with a clear message that everyone was responsible for supporting households with mould and condensation and it is a shared issue for Housing and Property Management teams.
- **Use of portable heaters** – this was to raise the awareness with staff about the fire risks with the inevitable increase in use of portable heaters.
- **Capping off supply request** – we had started to see a series of requests to disconnect and cap off gas supplies. The message was we would refuse this and support the households with managing their household finances where possible.

2. FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW

We looked at current open cases of damp, mould or condensation reports since October 2022 and introduced a more robust monitoring process of these cases.

We also looked at the previous 12 months' data on cases where damp, mould and condensation was mentioned by one of our tenants.

We reviewed all this data on previous cases with the head of service and have had a follow up session to look at how we responded to these cases. Further sessions are booked.

Mandatory Inspection and advice & support

We reiterated that Property Officers will inspect all damp, mould and condensation reports. Housing Officers will follow this up with information on support we can give with household finances and information on managing condensation. This is recorded through the checklist to confirm to the actions we will carry out and what we ask the household to be aware of.

Property surveyors now have an additional detailed checklist to ensure a thorough inspection is carried out and to record their observations on levels of recorded temperature and humidity levels in the property to help us tackle any issues with a plan. (Inspection Report attached in appendix 3)

We have provided our surveyors with additional training and moisture meters which help with diagnosing damp and condensation in a range of building materials such as walls, floors and the environment. We can measure moisture and humidity levels in homes and determine potential causes of moisture such as a building defect or condensation.

Where we believe condensation and high humidity levels in a home are a factor we provide a humidity and temperature monitor to all affected households to help them monitor moisture levels themselves.

We have improved record keeping to ensure we have detailed notes of the diagnosis, our response and advice given to the tenant.

We developed a single point of recording all new cases and all cases are flagged to a senior manager to ensure that an inspection is arranged and an appropriate response undertaken.

This has included immediate works such as replacement extraction fans, cleaning of mould affected areas, use of “Warmer Wall” decoration and advice through the joint checklist.

Households are given a Denbighshire branded leaflet to explain how to reduce condensation. (Attached as appendix 4)

We have asked all staff when visiting a property to check the operation of extractor fans in the home.

Advice and support

In addition to talking through the management of condensation with households we offer advice and support on household finances including energy bills. We have a partnership with Citizens Advice Denbighshire called “Key to Advice” which gives us a dedicated advice worker for council tenants in addition to access to the wider services provided by CAD.

A summary of outcomes for 2022/ 23 to date is as follows:

Key 2 Advice

Project Summary

	All Tenants				
	Annualised Targets	Year to Date	Quarter	Monthly Target	Month
Income Gain	£1,200,000	£1,794,821		£100,000	£390,784
Client Income Gains		437			37
Remove from Income Poverty		148			9
Remove from Fuel Poverty		42			4
Debt Managed	£1,400,000	£1,322,794		£116,667	£136,766
Debt Managed (People Count)		132			16
Clients Advised		967			122
Priority Debt		£471,319			£44,882

Information on cost of living issues and mould & condensation is included in our Autumn Newsletter 2022.

FORMAL REPAIRS POLICY REVIEW

We will review our Repairs Policy in 2023 and have asked our tenants federation, DTARF, to support us with this work. This will include adding more detail on the approach to damp, mould and condensation as described in this report.

TARGETED WORK

We targeted households to raise awareness of the support we can offer. These included those homes with the lowest EPC ratings. We spoke to 197 households living in E, F or G rated homes. (We accept the limitations with this approach but it was a starting point).

We contacted households in council homes who had not received the £150 energy payment rebate in the Autumn This resulted in an additional £45k of energy payments being made.

We revisited all cases where tenants had previously requested and had their gas supply disconnected.

Future Prevention

Prior to Autumn 2023, we are planning to write to all households affected by damp, mould or condensation in the past 2 years to raise awareness of condensation risks and to ask for any issue to be reported.

DISREPAIR CLAIMS

We reviewed progress on disrepair claims and used the July 2021 disrepair response to WG as a baseline when we had 4 open cases.

We currently have 2 current disrepair claims on-going.

Since 2019 we have agreed a financial settlement in 2 cases and in a further 3 cases we have carried out work but no financial settlement.

We recently included an article in our tenant's newsletter, sent to all our homes, for tenants to be wary of "no win no fee" solicitors and to use our complaints process and the Ombudsman if tenants are not happy with our service.

REPAIR DATA

We have analysed the instances of reports of damp, mould and condensation in the context of our overall repair and maintenance enquiries. This has enabled us to consider the proportion of these issues in terms of the overall volume of requests.

The instances of mould, damp and condensation as a proportion of all repair request are very low at less than 2%.

2021/22

Total repair jobs reported = 12183

Total Damp/Condensation/Mould = 206 or 1.7%

2022 (to date)

Total repair jobs recorded = 11018

Total Damp/Condensation/Mould = 168 or 1.5%

Since October 2022 and the national media coverage of mould and condensation, we have received 168 reports involving damp, mould and condensation. In terms of overall stock numbers this is 3% of our total stock.

In the year October 2021 to October 2022 we had 206 reports involving damp, mould, condensation or a leak so in terms of overall stock numbers this is 6% of our total stock numbers.

We have analysed all our data with regards to damp, mould and condensation to check to see if we can recognise any patterns. There does not appear to be any patterns linked to geographical area, type of property or attributes of the property. It is largely difficult to predict where damp, mould and condensation may occur.

FORMAL COMPLAINTS

We have analysed all higher level enquiries and complaints and the volumes involving damp, mould and condensation are low.

Complaints/Enquiries (higher level)

Service Area	Type	2021-22	2022-23
Property	All Enquiries	65	128
Property	Compliments	21	24
Property	Complaints	15	19
Property	FOI's, EIR's & SAR's	8	12
Property	MP/MS Enquiries	11	21
Property	Councillor Enquiries	8	44
Property	General Enquiries/Other	2	8
Property	Ombudsman Enquiry	0	0
Property	Data Breach	0	0

2021/22 – Of the 65 total enquiries/complaints, 3 were in relation to Damp/Mould/Condensation of which one was a compliment for fixing the damp issues.

2022/23 (April up to end of February 2023) – of the 128 total enquiries/complaints, 5 were in relation to Damp/Mould/Condensation.

PROPERTIES OF CONCERN

We have identified “hard to heat” properties to target our use of ORP funding. We have installed 150 air source heat pumps (ASHP’s) and other retrofit works in these properties as we are aware of the cost and inefficiency of off gas heating systems.

In our July 2021 response we had identified Canol Y Dre, Ruthin, 17 family houses, as being a risk of damp issues. There is currently on site a programme to fully retrofit these homes with EWI, ASHP and PV panels underway

We also identified issues at Lloyd Avenue, Denbigh, where although the EPC rating is D, we are aware of issues with the solid wall construction. We are planning for these homes to be prioritised in forthcoming retrofit / improvement programmes.

GOVERNANCE

The Head of Housing & Communities has updated Cabinet and SLT with the above actions in December 2022.

We have referred this issue for formal Scrutiny review and are awaiting confirmation of a date for this review.

We instigated a discussion with the Council’s Cabinet in the days following the news about Awaab as part of agenda item to look at Renting Homes Wales and the Fitness for Human Habitation (FFHH). This was to give reassurance on the above work that is taking place and our proactive approach to dealing with repairs regardless of disrepair claims or complaints. This discussion on this specific matter was reported in North Wales media.

SUMMARY

In summary we have carried out the following actions -

1. We have reviewed our approach once we receive a report of damp, mould and condensation.
2. We have Introduced a checklist for staff and tenants in addition to our existing guidance leaflet.
3. We have introduced a new inspection report for surveyors to guide the inspection process.
4. We will continue to raise awareness of damp, mould and condensation through our newsletter and social media.
5. We will continue to give all households, where condensation is an issue a leaflet with infographic on avoiding and managing moisture in the home.
6. We have updated our equipment for surveyors to support diagnosis of damp, mould and condensation.
7. We will supply households with a basic humidity monitor to support and guide them with moisture levels in their home.
8. All customer facing staff have attended a mandatory briefing on the cost of living risks.
9. We have reviewed cases over past 12 months to ensure we have completed any outstanding work and advice ad to updated on progress for households affected.
10. We have set up monitoring of new cases from October 2022 onwards with robust monitoring.
11. We will write to all households affected by damp, mould or condensation (in the past 2 years) prior to Autumn 2023 to raise awareness of condensation risks and to ask for any issues to be reported.
12. We have targeted “hard to heat” homes with modern heating improvements and have installed 150 air source heat pumps in these homes.
13. We will continue to improve the energy efficiency of our homes through Optimised Retrofit work and other capital programmes.
14. We have referred this matter to the Council’s Scrutiny structure.