



Report of: **Executive Member for Housing and Development**

Meeting of:	Date	Ward(s)
Executive	27th April 2017	All

SUBJECT: Health Implications of Damp Properties – Executive member response to the report of the Health and Care Scrutiny Committee

1. Synopsis

- 1.1 On 24 November 2016 the Executive received a report from the Health and Care Scrutiny Committee regarding the health implications of damp properties.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To agree the Executive responses to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee as set out in section 4 of this report.

3. Background

- 3.1 In June 2015 the Health and Care Scrutiny Committee commissioned a review of the Health Implications of Damp Properties within the borough.
- 3.2 The review ran from July 2015 until September 2016 and evidence was received from a variety of sources.
- 3.3 Presentations from Council Officers
Baljinder Heer-Matiana, Senior Public Health Strategist; Damian Dempsey, Group Leader – Quantity Surveyors and Ellis Turner, Environmental Health Manager-Residential
- 3.4 Documentary evidence
Information from the Office of Deputy Prime Minister 2006 Housing, Health and Safety Policing system.

3.5 Information from witnesses

Katie White of Andover TRA, Jan Manderson of Girdlestone TRA, John Venning of Partners, Stephen Filis of Anthea Lettings and James Stone of Hyde HA.

The outcome of the scrutiny review was 12 recommendations (see Page 2 of report dated September 2016).

4. Recommendations and Service Update

4.1 Recommendation 1 - Rehousing of tenants

Where there are damp issues in a property, and tenants can evidence related health issues, the Council is to presume that the damp is the cause of the health problems, and where tenants wish to be rehoused, the Council and Partners for improvement (PFI) are to progress rehousing. RSL's and private landlords are also to be encouraged to adopt the same policy

4.1.1 Response to Recommendation 1

Under the Housing Act 1996 a local authority must have an allocation scheme which shows how accommodation in the borough is allocated. By law the scheme must ensure that key groups are given 'reasonable preference', this includes people who are homeless, need to move on medical grounds or people living in unsatisfactory housing. Before changing its allocation scheme an authority must consult with residents, local Registered Providers (housing associations) and must carry out an equality impact assessment.

Islington's current scheme was agreed by the Executive in July 2013.

The council's current housing allocation scheme already provides for giving additional priority for residents living in accommodation which has an impact on their health, including because of dampness. An extract from the scheme is below:

The council may give points if it considers that an applicant or a member of their household's accommodation is unsuitable because of a medical condition.

*Medical priority will be awarded according to the extent to which the health of one of more members of the applicant's household is affected by their housing conditions and the expected benefits of providing alternative housing. **No medical points will be given if there is a medical condition but the accommodation is suitable.***

A household will be assessed together and one award made for the whole household. The number of medical points you will be given depends on the household's health and the severity of the conditions in their home. There are three categories of medical points:

Category A – *this gives the maximum 150 points, an award will be made:*

In exceptional circumstances for households where a member of the household has an immediately life-threatening or progressive condition which is seriously affected by their current accommodation

Category B – *is an award of 80 points and is for households where a member of the households current housing conditions are having a major adverse effect on their medical condition. It will not apply where the effect of the housing conditions on health is moderate, slight or variable.*

Category C – *awards 40 points and is for households where a member of the household's current housing conditions are having a moderate or variable effect on their medical condition. It will not apply where the effect of the housing conditions on health is slight.*

Partners follow the same policy as the council in allocations.

4.2 Recommendation 2 - Building/Fabric issues

That the repairs department, when investigating complaints about damp, should consistently eliminate roof leaks, rising damp, plumbing issues, ventilation issues, cold bridging, lack of insulation on and any building fabric issues as causes of damp, before raising 'lifestyle' issues with residents. Many residents report a presumption on the part of Council surveyors that all damp issues are due to 'lifestyle', where in fact the issues are often building related

4.2.1 Response to Recommendation 2

We have reviewed our processes when diagnosing damp and mould to ensure that there is no presumption that all damp issues are due to residents' behaviours. Surveyors undertake full inspections to the internal & external elements to all reported properties. Repairs are raised and completed where necessary. Before any other possible contributing factors are considered we will ensure the property is free of all internal and external leaks.

4.2.2 Partners repair supervisors and surveyors all receive training to ensure that they correctly diagnose the causes of damp and specify appropriate remedial works. This includes specifying work to remedy excessive condensation caused by the design of the dwelling e.g. very cold rear additions. If we think that the condensation is caused by the tenant not heating and ventilating their home adequately then we will work with them and assist them to take appropriate measures to reduce condensation. If we identify that fuel poverty might be an issue that a particular resident is facing, we will make a referral to the SHINE team.

4.3 Recommendation 3 - Experienced Damp Surveyor

An experienced damp surveyor to be employed by the Council and PFI to investigate and resolve damp problems. (The Committee heard that the response of officers to complaints of damp is prone to inconsistency, and also repeat visits, for no apparent reason. Surveyor's knowledge of damp-related issues is found to be variable.)

4.3.1 Response to Recommendation 3

All surveyors' reports are being reviewed to ensure that the level of reporting and diagnosis is at the expected standard and we are addressing the repairs in the property.

4.3.2 Partners repair supervisors and surveyors have all received damp training from a damp specialist to ensure that they correctly diagnose the causes of damp and specify appropriate remedial works. More complex damp jobs are referred to an independent damp specialist (not a damp proofing contractor) to provide a full damp report which specifies the remedial work.

4.4 Recommendation 4 - Hyde Damp and Condensation Survey proforma

That following the Council's Condensation Protocol discussion document, this proforma be adopted by the Council's housing department and other RSL's, as a basic structure for investigating damp (Prof forma attached as Appendix to the report)

4.4.1 Response to Recommendation 4

We currently have a damp proforma that has been specifically tailored to Islington Council properties. We will review the Hyde proforma to see if there are any useful additions that can be added to our current proforma.

4.4.2 Partners already uses a proforma for investigating damp but will review the Council's proposed proforma to see what improvements can be made.

4.5 Recommendation 5 - Systematic response by Council officers

That the Executive consider working in partnership with housing associations which are undertaking Council, PFI, and RSL surveyors, as well as adopting the standardised pro-forma under recommendation 4 above, should be consistent in their reporting their findings to residents. Residents report inefficiencies, with surveyors adopting different responses and strategies, and recommending different courses of action for similar types of damp problems.

4.5.1 Response to Recommendation 5

We are currently looking at options to arrange workshops with other Islington Council surveying departments. This will enable ideas and strategies being discussed to combat common damp issues within our housing stock. We will reissue the damp and condensation procedure to all staff.

4.6 Recommendation 6 - Database of damp properties

The Council and PFI are to set up and maintain a database of properties across the borough that have known damp issues.

4.6.1 Response to Recommendation 6

We have a database that we use to ensure that damp and mould is regularly monitored. This is regularly discussed and reviewed during surveyors meetings and Diagnostic team meetings to ensure that we maintain service delivery to our residents.

4.6.2 Partners track all major damp jobs and keeps a separate record of all completed major damp works.

4.7 Recommendation 7 - Help On Your Doorstep database

Help on Your Doorstep have offered to share with the Council information on residents they have contacted with damp issues. Repairs department to take up this offer to help establish more accurately the extent of damp problems. (Any personal information to be shared only with residents consent.)

4.7.1 Response to Recommendation 7

We have contacted Help On Your Doorstep and will be arranging a meeting with the Operations Manager Denise Ward to discuss a way that we can work in partnership to support Islington Council's residents.

4.8 Recommendation 8 - Legal issues accessing leasehold properties

That the Council and PFI take robust legal steps to access all leasehold properties, where the damp issues appear to emanate from leasehold properties adjoining council tenancies. Also, that legal advice be taken on the scope and options to access leaseholder properties, and the advice be circulated to all officers involved in damp investigations.

4.8.1 Response to Recommendation 8

Area Housing Office staff work in tandem with Housing Property Services to ensure that we follow our procedure for repairs access arrangements for leasehold properties.

4.8.2 Partners Housing Manager will discuss this issue with their solicitor and produce a guidance note for their staff.

4.9 Recommendation 9 - External or Internal Wall insulation:

The Council, PFI and RSL'S should carry out external or internal wall insulation, wherever

feasible and cost effective on all Council and RSL estates within the borough. There should be a presumption that insulation works form a part of any major works undertaken. The success of the recent external wall insulation work at Holly Park Estate in saving energy costs and reducing dampness problems for residents, is evidence of the effectiveness of this strategy.

4.9.1 Response to Recommendation 9

In the Council's stock 99% of cavity walls have been insulated with only a few of unusual design, where it is not technically feasible to insulate, remaining untreated. Current building regulations ensure that new buildings are built to high standards of thermal efficiency.

The Council recognises the idea that solid-walled buildings should receive insulation wherever possible. External wall insulation (EWI) has been fitted at Neptune House and Holly Park using grant funding and the proposed scheme to fit EWI to a further 304 flats in four blocks, including three high rise blocks, is funded through a mixture of corporate capital and Section 106 Carbon Offset contributions. We are currently drawing up a possible programme for EWI to medium rise stock in case further Section 106 funding becomes available.

We do not generally use Internal Wall Insulation (IWI) because, as well as the disruption to residents and loss of room size, IWI can pose risks to the fabric of buildings, including potentially increasing the risk of interstitial condensation. However where EWI is not possible, for instance in 'stepped' properties with balconies forming roofs, and there are no other alternatives, we do consider IWI. This is the case on the Andover Estate, where significant internal insulation works are being undertaken. In this case the insulation is required to resolve a cold-bridging problem where a balcony forms the roof of a flat below.

4.9.2 Partners do fit thermal insulation boards to the internal face of external walls when the design of a dwelling is contributing to excessive condensation e.g. very cold rear additions with three external walls.

External cladding is not always considered appropriate for street properties in Islington.

4.10 Recommendation 10 - Improvement grants

Publicity be made available to private sector landlords on grants available for improvements to insulation for properties.

4.10.1 Response to Recommendation 10

Environmental Health currently only offer one grant to landlords for empty properties. This grant funding is extremely limited and operates on a first come first served basis. We do not have any other grants for private landlords for insulation or dampness.

4.10.2 In 2015, Partners worked with the Seasonal Health & Affordable Warmth Team (SHINE) to deliver thermal improvement works funded by grants. This was to address affordable warmth and damp issues. Eligibility for grant funding was based on vulnerability. SHINE identified suitable dwellings for improvement works and delivered a limited programme.

4.11 Recommendation 11 - Clear information leaflets

Leaflets should be issued to residents on how to report and to deal with damp issues. This should also include advice on how to operate heating systems to maximum effectiveness and to deal with any condensation issues. Leaflets should also be made available to GP surgeries across the borough, and with GP's being made aware of the existence of the leaflets, and asked to distribute them to tenants that present with damp related health problems.

4.11.1 Response to Recommendation 11

Council surveyors issue leaflets to our residents when carrying out inspections for damp and mould. The leaflets are also distributed from Area Housing Offices and is available on the council website. These leaflets were reviewed during 2016 and now include information for residents on the effective use of their heating systems and tips on how to prevent and reduce condensation in the home. We are currently investigating having the leaflet distributed from local GPs' surgeries.

4.11.2 Partners have leaflets advising residents how to manage condensation and the leaflet is regularly reviewed to ensure effective communication. They also provide advice on how to use heating systems efficiently and have the manuals for newly installed boilers on their website.

4.12 Recommendation 12 - GP information programme

Public Health and Environmental Health are to work with the CCG to disseminate information to the Borough's GP's on the extent and issues with damp properties and their perceived interaction with health issues, and to request GP's to return data to the CCG when they are seen by patients with health issues that appear to be related to living in a damp property.

4.12.1 Response to Recommendation 12

Environmental Health have dialogue with colleagues in Public Health and various commissioners in CCG. Officers from the SHINE team and newly created posts of senior practitioners both sit in the many different Multi-Disciplinary Team case conferences that sit to unpick some of the most complex patients' cases.

Both the SHINE team and the senior practitioners try ensure that the housing condition question is raised and where appropriate a referral is made through SHINE to Environmental Health for further investigation.

5. Implications

5.1 Financial implications:

It is not possible to precisely quantify the financial implications of these recommendations at this stage however the following can be said.

If implemented recommendations 2 - 8 and 10 -12 are either already current practice or primarily involve a change/improvement in administrative practices/processes and as such are unlikely to generate a significant additional cost, but conversely recommendations 1 and 9 could potentially generate a very significant additional cost to the HRA.

Hence, it is important that these recommendations be considered against the backdrop of the HRA needing to deliver a package of savings totalling £18m over the next 4 years in order to mitigate against the loss of income arising from the 1% rent reduction.

Therefore a decision to proceed, with in particular recommendations 1 & 9, will mean either diverting capital resources that have been allocated to other projects or reducing the housing management or repairs service to compensate for any increased costs.

5.2 Legal Implications:

There are no specific legal implications on this report. Where required, legal advice and support will be provided to Housing Services in respect of the implementation of the recommendations in particular recommendation 8.

5.3 Resident Impact Assessment:

The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

Where the proposals in this report may have equalities implications and other implications for residents. Resident Impact Assessments (including assessment of equalities implications) will be undertaken as part of the process of developing and implementing policies and actions arising from this report.

5.4 Environmental Impact Assessment:

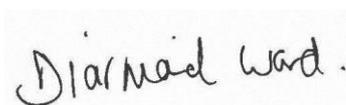
Although there may be some environmental impact from works to reduce damp in properties (e.g. resource use, waste generation), the works have a long-term positive environmental impact as they can lengthen the lifespan of buildings, avoiding the need for early demolition and replacement or keeping the dwelling empty. Works that involve improving levels of insulation also reduce the energy consumption of the dwellings being treated.

6. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 6.1 This report details the Executive's response to the recommendations of the Health and Care Scrutiny Committee.

Final report clearance:

Signed by:



4 April 2017

Executive Member for Housing and Development

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